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Representations of travel and displacement in the work of contemporary Italian women writers

Representations of Travel and Displacement in the Work of Contemporary Italian Women Writers

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ABSTRACT

Scholars of Italian literature have pointed to the low status afforded to travel writing and, until comparatively recently, the marginalisation of women's writing. As a consequence, female-authored accounts of travel have suffered a double-invisibility which this thesis seeks to address by providing an indication of the scope of recent work on travel by Italian women, the variety of generic forms their writing assumes, and the wide range of issues that their texts confront. Its methodology derives from approaches to identity which are broadly post-structuralist in that identity is seen as being located in the articulations of the self or in its performance. The thesis looks at writings on travel as texts in which the author assumes a series of subject positions in relation to home and host cultures. Though the thesis discusses a wide range of texts by contemporary Italian women, its primary focus is on the notion of self that emerges from their texts. The first chapter discusses how childhood memories of Italy's colonial past are interrogated in the semi-autobiographical novels of Erminia Dell'Oro. The connection between place and identity is analysed in the second chapter through the problematic notion of home in Laura Pariani's fictionalized portrayal of women emigrants in Argentina and in the private memoirs of women migrants to South America. Travel and displacement coalesce in the writings of Bamboo Hirst whose performative construction of cultural identity is a response to her sense of estrangement from both China and Italy. The fourth chapter discusses three women's exploration of the religious dimension of another culture. It looks at the postmodern sense of self that emerges from the introspective accounts of journeys through India undertaken by Sandra Petrignani, Francesca De Carolis and Alessandra Borghese. The final chapter examines the writings of three prominent Italian journalists, Oriana Fallaci, Lilli Gruber and Giuliana Sgrena, and argues that the way they conceptualise their own identity in their writing leads to very different interpretations of cultures of the Near East. The accounts of travel discussed represent journeys into the self in which the traveller becomes aware of the processes that constitute identity and the way in which social and cultural structures impinge upon the workings of subjectivity.

DEDICATION

to Suzanne Lee and Angela Brown

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It is inevitable that a thesis on travel writing will, at some point, make reference to the author's personal journey. My journey through Italian studies started as an undergraduate in Cardiff back in 1995 and I am extremely grateful that those persons who motivated and inspired me at such an early stage are still very much a part of that ongoing journey today. First, I would like to acknowledge the enormous debt I owe to my supervisor, Dr. Charles Burdett, who has spent considerable time discussing and reviewing my work and offering constructive advice. I particularly appreciate the help he has provided during the final stages in guiding me towards completion of the thesis. I also wish to thank all members of staff in the Italian Department at Bristol University for their support, and I especially valued the comments and suggestions that Professor Derek Duncan offered on drafts of the first three chapters. For financial assistance, I wish to thank the Faculty of Arts at Bristol University for the studentship which enabled me to complete my research. Vanna Motta was an important influence in my decision to leave Parma and return to postgraduate study and I am grateful for her continued support. Many thanks also to Guyda Armstrong for her words of encouragement, proofreading services and, of course, those invaluable morning-coffees. I also appreciated the help and assistance of the staff at the Archivio Diaristico, Pieve Santo Stefano, notably Loretta Veri, Cristina Cangi, and Daniela Brighigni. And finally, warmest thanks to my friends in Italy and in Britain for their patience and understanding over the last four years and to my parents for providing that start and end point of travel: a place to call home.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: ..... DATE: 4 February 2008

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INTRODUCTION

TRAVEL: ITS MEANINGS AND MOTIVATIONS

In recent years there has been an ever-increasing body of work devoted to travel and travel writing, from anthologies of travel texts, collections of critical essays and theoretical works that interrogate the concept of travel. James Duncan and Derek Gregory have referred to this phenomenon as an 'explosion of interest in travel writing'.[1] Many such critical studies begin by taking issue with Paul Fussell's claim that real travel is no longer possible.[2] According to Fussell, there can be no authentic, in the sense of unmediated, way of experiencing an elsewhere as, he claims, places are now packaged and offered to the tourist as commodities in an already interpreted form. Rather than travel as an encounter with the exotic, he alleges that global tourism has led to an erasure of difference. As a result, modern-day tourists are presented with instantly recognizable sites in places which replicate the comforting familiarities of home and they are encouraged not to see and interpret but to spend and consume. In his assertion that 'before tourism there was travel, and before travel there was exploration' and by defining travel as a bourgeois phenomenon whilst associating tourism with the proletariat, Fussell constructs a hierarchy of travelling activities and presents what is arguably a confined definition of what actually constitutes travel.[3] Furthermore, his distinction between travel and tourism locates travel in a particular moment of human history, one that coincides with European imperial expansion and therefore implicitly posits the travelling subject as a white, European middle-class male. More recent critical studies on travel and travel writing

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[1] James Duncan and Derek Gregory, 'Introduction', in *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, ed. by James Duncan and Derek Gregory (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1-13 (p. 1).
[2] Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 37. Similarly, Claude Levi-Strauss claimed that real travel writing came to an end in the 1930s. See *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. by J. and D. Weightman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).
[3] Fussell, p. 38.

have sought to address this somewhat biased perspective by examining the differences that class, gender, race and sexuality bring to bear on both the experience of travel and its textual representations. On the subject of gender, for example, Sara Mills' *Discourses of Difference* discusses the particular discursive constraints which influenced the writings of women travellers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and considers women's ambiguous position in relation to the colonial systems in which they lived and travelled.[4] Sidonie Smith in *Moving Lives* examines how women in the twentieth century have appropriated new technologies of motion – the plane, the train and the automobile – which have profoundly altered their relationship to time and space, transforming the narrative of the journey and disentangling travel from its masculinist logic.[5]

In contrast to Fussell, Jonathan Culler proposes that the tendency to distinguish between tourism and travel and between authentic and inauthentic experiences of place is internal to the practice of tourism.[6] He suggests that the desire to see oneself as a traveller but other travellers as tourists is born out of modern capitalist culture which fosters hostility between individuals rather than a sense of community. He describes the disparaging remarks that many commentators have directed at tourists as the 'vituperative nostalgia of conservatives, who fondly imagine a time where the elite alone traveled and everything in the world showed itself truly to them'.[7] Culler argues that there can be no direct experience of reality as places and cultures are always mediated through a system of signs and therefore notions of the authentic and

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[4] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991).
[5] Sidonie Smith, *Moving Lives: Twentieth-Century Women's Travel Writing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
[6] Jonathan Culler, 'The Semiotics of Tourism', in *Framing the Sign: Criticism and its Institutions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), pp. 153-67.
[7] Culler, *Semiotics of Tourism*, p. 167. Culler goes as far as to suggest that Fussell's own antipathy towards tourists stemmed from his own anxiety not to be taken as an American tourist in Britain (p. 156).

the inauthentic belong to the same semiotic system. Rather than denigrating tourists, he considers tourism to be worthy of cultural criticism as it draws attention to the way that signifying practices operate in and between cultures.

Seen in this light, the travel/tourism dichotomy gives way to a broad spectrum of travelling activities which opens up onto the whole gamut of human experience. Although travel is central to human existence, it is a historically and culturally specific undertaking, expressed in different forms at different times, and is prompted by a range of personal and political motivations. As Eric Leed in *The Mind of the Traveler* observes, the meaning of travel and the reasons for the journey have changed over time: 'Ancients saw travel as a suffering, even a penance; for moderns, it is a pleasure and a means to pleasure.'[8] Throughout the ages human travel has taken on a variety of forms. People travelled whether as pilgrims, missionaries, exiles, refugees, explorers, nomads, diplomats, soldiers, merchants, journalists, migrants, or tourists. Journeys past and present have been motivated by religious devotion, the search for employment, the promise of adventure, a desire for knowledge and fulfilment, or simply the pursuit of pleasure.

The modes of travel available and the places that are accessible are very much dependent on one's point of origin, as clearly not all humans enjoy the same freedom of movement nor do they possess the same means to achieve it. For the more privileged of the world, travel to another place often represents a way of escaping the routine of everyday life. Alain de Botton in *The Art of Travel* explains how, on a gloomy December day in London, he is seduced by the glossy cover of a travel brochure with its idyllic scenes of the azure skies and white beaches of Barbados.[9] Paul Theroux presents his journey through Africa in *Dark Star Safari* as being

[8] Eric J. Leed, *The Mind of Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), p. 7.
[9] Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 9.

prompted by a desire to escape to some inaccessible place, far from the constant demands of mobile phones, faxes and emails.[10] Travel is viewed by many as a life-enhancing experience, one that confers status on the travelling subject, and a person who is widely travelled is often regarded as more knowledgeable, experienced, and perhaps even brave.[11]

Rockwell Grey, however, points out that travel for pleasure is only a recent phenomenon: 'In the total human record, journeys undertaken in desperation for sheer survival bulk indescribably larger than those recorded in the lively, polished accounts of modern travellers in search of adventure and refreshment.'[12] For the less privileged then, migration to another country represents their aspirations for a better life; it holds out promises of land, prospects of work and improved social conditions. In more extreme circumstances, travel can be prompted by the need to escape from war, poverty, famine or political and/or religious persecution. Fussell uses the etymological connection between travel and *travail* to make a distinction between his notion of genuine travel, which involves considerable effort, and the ease of modern tourism facilitated by air travel and organised tours. Yet, the experiences of those who face real hardship as they migrate to other lands would be excluded from his rather confined definition of travel.[13] Why, though, should the experiences of those who travel for personal fulfilment be celebrated above those who travel out of necessity? It is precisely the *travail* of travel that many migrants face, as their dreams of a better life drive them to undertake an often arduous journey in which their very lives may be at risk. A wider and more inclusive view of travel is therefore needed to

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[10] Paul Theroux, *Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Cape Town* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 4.
[11] Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-17 (p. 2). See also Leed, p. 2.
[12] Rockwell Gray, 'Travel', in *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel*, ed. by Michael Kowalewski (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), pp. 33-52 (p. 48).
[13] Fussell, p. 39.

avoid limiting the discussion to the experiences of a privileged (and usually male) few. Whilst the motivations for individual journeys are complex and involve varying degrees of volition, all involve an encounter with another culture and entail some element of displacement in which the traveller moves from a familiar environment to an unknown or unfamiliar place. Arguably, the notion of travel writing can, and should, be extended to include a wide range of experiences, from tourist accounts and the correspondence of journalists to the writings of migrants and the reflections of people who have lived abroad.

MIGRATION IN AND OUT OF ITALY

Over the course of the last one hundred years, migration to and from Italy has played a huge role in shaping ideas of the nation both at home and abroad. Italy's history as a country of emigrants is well documented. As Donna Gabaccia maintains:

> Overall, no other people migrated in so many directions and in such impressive numbers – relatively and absolutely – as from Italy. And few showed such firm attachment to their home regions, or returned in such large proportions.[14]

Twenty-seven million migrants left Italy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and many of these journeyed to places such as the United States, Canada, Australia and South America.[15] These migrations have left indelible marks on both the destination and country of origin.[16] Only in recent decades, from the 1970s onwards, has this migratory flow been reversed and Italy has now become an important destination for migrants from regions such as North Africa, the Balkans and Eastern

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[14] Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (London: UCL press, 2000), p. 60.

[15] *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World*, ed. by Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p. xi.

[16] For a survey of Italian Australian life writing see John Gatt Rutter, 'Bello the Bilingual Cockatoo: Writing Italian Lives in Australia', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 24 (2006), 107-32. On changing images of modernity and notions of ethnicity in Italian migrants to Argentina see Arnd Schneider, *Futures Lost: Nostalgia and Identity among Italian Immigrants in Argentina* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000). Melania Mazzucco's best-selling novel, *Vita*, offers a fictionalised account of the lives of Italian migrants in New York at the turn of the twentieth century (Milan: Rizzoli, 2003).

Europe.[17] Several recent studies have appealed for increased academic and public attention to the emerging body of writing by migrants to Italy. In *Mediterranean Crossroads*, Graziella Parati presents a selection of extracts from immigrant authored texts and suggests that exploring the connections between previous waves of outward Italian migration and the more recent migration into Italy can offer a useful way of reading these works.[18] In her more recent study, *Migration Italy*, Parati considers migrant writing in Italian to be a minor literature which proves a valuable tool for exploring identity constructions within Italy. Such texts, she claims, talk back both to normative constructions of Italy as a homogenous entity and provide a response to the reductive, often sensationalist, images of migrants played out in the mainstream media. Parati argues that migrant writing exposes the image of Italy as a monocultural nation to be a fiction, albeit one with very real consequences for those who find themselves excluded from, or on the margins of the parameters of *Italianità*.[19]

Armando Gnisci includes the writings of both Italian emigrants and recent immigrants to the Italian peninsular in what he terms *la letteratura italiana della migrazione* and argues that such texts should be incorporated into understandings of Italian literature. His recent anthology, *Nuovo planetario italiano*, aims at increasing the prominence of migrant writers in Italy, which, he claims, have been largely overlooked by the Italian public and ignored by critics and academics.[20] The writings of women migrants to Italy feature prominently in this field, for example, Nassera

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[17] Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 11.

[18] *Mediterranean Crossroads: Migration Literature in Italy*, ed. by Graziella Parati (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), p. 21. For a detailed textual analysis of selected novels by migrant writers see Jennifer Burns, 'Recent Immigrant Writing in Italian: A Fragile Enterprise', *The Italianist*, 18 (1998), 213-44.

[19] See Parati, *Migration Italy*, pp. 12-13.

[20] Armando Gnisci, *La letteratura italiana della migrazione* (Rome: Lilith, 1998).
Nuovo planetario italiano, ed. by Armando Gnisci (Troina, EN: Città Aperta, 2006).

Chohra's *Volevo diventare bianca* (1993), Shirin Ramzanali Fazel's *Lontano da Mogadiscio* (1994), Ribka Sibhatu's *Aulò: canto-poesia dell' Eritrea*, and *Con il vento nei capelli* (1993), by Salwa Salem.[21]

Parati and Gnisci both agree that Italy is a unique case within the European context of migration as, for most of the twentieth century, Italy was a country of emigration rather than immigration, and Italy's period of colonial rule, which spanned only a few decades at the start of the century, was brief in comparison to that of other major European nations. As a result, current migrants to Italy are more likely to have come from a former colony of another European nation and be proficient in languages such as French or English rather than Italian.[22] Italy's short colonial history and longer period of outward migration may also, to a certain extent, explain the invisibility of Italian-authored travel texts, as the development of the travel writing genre in English was, in many ways, linked with British imperial expansion. Furthermore, as Gnisci points out, the Italian diasporas of the last hundred years have produced little in the way of travel literature in Italian as these migrants were most likely to be poor and illiterate, more concerned with work and their daily survival than with documenting their journeys.[23]

In view of the recent work currently being carried out in this field by the above mentioned scholars, the writing of migrants to Italy is not the intended focus of this thesis. Such writings nevertheless form an important body of work which offers a different perspective on travel and conceptualizations of personal and collective identities. Instead, the thesis focuses on the writings of women who have travelled outside Italy, as migrants, colonial settlers, tourists and foreign correspondents.

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[21] On the writing of female immigrants in Italy see Lucie Benchouiha, 'Hybrid Identities? Immigrant Women's Writing in Italy', *Italian Studies*, 61: 2 (2006), 251-62.
[22] See Gnisci, *La letteratura italiana della migrazione*, p. 27; Parati, *Mediterranean Crossroads*, p. 16.
[23] Gnisci, *La letteratura italiana della migrazione*, pp. 22-4.

Looking at texts which represent the experience of outward migration, as I do in the first two chapters of this thesis, is one way of examining how, in various moments and different geographical locations, Italians understood themselves, their past and the others with whom they came into contact.

THE FLUIDITY AND FORTUNES OF THE GENRE

Just as there are various modes and means of travelling, so too the accounts of travel can be encoded in a variety of textual forms including letters, diaries, memoirs, novels, foreign correspondence and autobiographical works.[24] Travel writing has been described as a hybrid, fluid and mixed genre; Kowalewski refers to its 'generic androgyny' and 'dauntingly heterogeneous' character.[25] The notion of generic androgyny, a term which Kowalewski borrows from Bill Buford, is perhaps a fitting metaphor for the way in which travel accounts often combine a narrative of adventure, a stereotypically male genre, with a confessional form of text such as the private diary or letter which, in the past, have been regarded as more typically female modes of representation. Raffaella Baccolini suggests that travel writing reflects the nature of the travel experience itself in that just as the traveller crosses borders and boundaries, so too travel writing is marginal and liminal, always crossing borders and moving between genres.[26] This point is reiterated by many other theorists: Kowalewski writes: 'Travel writing involves border crossings both literal and

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[24] For an overview of the development of travel writing and especially its evolution from factual accounts to the foregrounding of narrative consciousness, see Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing: The Self and the World* (London: Routledge, 2002). For a historical survey of travel writing in English between 1500 and 2000, see *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[25] Michael Kowalewski, 'Introduction: The Modern Literature of Travel', in *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel*, ed. by Michael Kowalewski (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), pp. 1-16.

[26] Raffaella Baccolini, '"There is no other way to say it": Joan Didion's Salvador' in *Travel Writing and the Female Imaginary*, ed. by Vita Fortunati and others (Bologna: Patron, 2001), pp. 99-108 (p. 100).

figurative.'[27] In their introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs likewise insist on a broad definition of an ever-shifting genre.[28] Casey Blanton claims that travel writing has survived as a result of its fluid and adaptable nature.[29] Travel writing then is widely accepted as a broad genre, one that encompasses various modes of representation and borrows from other generic conventions. It makes frequent excursions into fiction, detours into autobiography and even the occasional flight into fantasy.

Whilst the general definitions offered by theorists as to what constitutes travel writing have some validity, to offer a precise definition of such writing would be to delimit what is generally recognised to be a diverse and changeable genre. Nevertheless, whilst recognising that there will always be exceptions to any rule, some general perceptions regarding the nature of travel narratives can still be made. Travel writing is usually a factual account, narrated in the first person with a plot that revolves around the concept of a journey, beginning with departure, a period of travel or residence abroad and ending with the return home. Bill Buford in *Granta* 10 defines travel writing as 'a narrative told in the first person, authenticated by lived experience'.[30] Fussell too suggests that 'the [travel] narrative – unlike that in a novel or romance – claims literal validity by constant reference to actuality'.[31] There is then, an implicit accord between writer and reader that the text is a truthful account of an actual journey undertaken by the author whose narrative provides a faithful representation of a real place. Jan Borm refers to this agreement as the referential pact, although his analysis of travel texts shows that the distinction between fact and fiction is difficult to maintain. Instead, Borm prefers to distinguish texts according to

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[27] Kowalewski, *Temperamental Journeys*, p. 7.
[28] Hulme and Youngs, pp. 1, 10.
[29] Blanton, p. 29.
[30] Bill Buford, 'Editorial', in *Granta* 10 (1984), 5-7 (p. 7).
[31] Fussell, *Abroad*, p. 203.

their dominant aspects. This leads him to suggest that travel books or travelogues are non-fiction dominant, whilst he reserves the term travel writing as an umbrella term for various texts, fictional or otherwise, that are preoccupied with the theme of travel.[32] Luigi Monga also recognises the difficulties that lie in an insistence on the factual nature of travel texts:

> Every travel writer, consciously or not, performs a *mise en intrigue* to underscore and reorganize elements that are not always essential to the factual journey. The result is a growing ambivalence between facts and fiction, a result which blurs the distinction between travel and fictional narrative, for the narrator/witness slowly has evolved into a character/actor whose goal is to become the center of interest.[33]

The narrator of a travel account then, usually claims to offer an accurate representation of an actual place and lived experience, although any eventual representation is inevitably subjective, influenced by the workings of memory and shaped through a process of selection, omission, elaboration and even falsification of events. In recognition of the fluid nature of the genre, the terms 'writing on travel' or 'accounts of travel' rather than 'travel writing' are frequently used in this thesis to describe different modes of travel and a variety of textual forms that centre on the experience of movement between places.

Travel writing, until comparatively recently, had been considered by many critics and writers to be a low-status genre and therefore unworthy of any serious academic study. Its generic proximity to autobiography and reportage, considered as more 'factual' texts, has undermined its status as literature. Kowalewski discusses the disdain for travel writing expressed by Wallace Stegner, Nathan Asch and Kingsley Amis, and refutes their contention that travel writing should not be considered

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[32] Jan Borm, 'Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology', in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, ed. by Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 13-26 (p. 13).

[33] Luigi Monga, 'Travel and Travel Writing: An Historical Overview of Hodoeporics', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 14 (1996), 6-54 (p. 54).

Literature.[34] In the past few decades, however, travel accounts have received increased attention from academics across a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, geography, history as well as literary studies, with the subsequent publication of anthologies of travellers' tales, critical analyses of texts and theoretical studies on travel. Indeed, the interest of many geographers in literary accounts of travel and spatial metaphors of poststructuralist theory prompts John Kerrigan to refer to a disciplinary melt-down in the humanities.[35] However, despite the increased attention to travel and travel writing by predominantly Anglophone scholars, negative attitudes pertaining to travel texts have taken longer to fade in Italy. Loredana Polezzi in her study of Italian travel writing in English translation describes travel writing by Italian authors to be a 'genre in disguise'.[36] There are, she claims, no shortage of travel accounts by Italian writers and no lack of interest in travel, yet Italian readers are far more likely to pick up a travel book by a British or American author in translation than they are to read works by an Italian author, and they show more interest in how Italy is perceived from outside than in Italian representations of a foreign culture. Polezzi outlines several reasons for the invisibility of travel writing in Italian and the lack of scholarly attention to the genre by critics. These include the late development of the Italian novel and travel writing's long association with journalism which have led to it being treated as a source of historical and geographical information rather than a literary text.[37] Its non-literary or sub-literary status therefore has resulted in the marginalisation of travel

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[34] Kowalewski, p. 2.
[35] John Kerrigan, 'The Country of the Mind', *TLS*, 11 September 1998.
[36] Loredana Polezzi, *Translating Travel: Contemporary Italian Travel Writing in English Translation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 54.
[37] Both Polezzi and De Pascale note that what we can define as travel writing was often first published in newspapers or periodicals. De Pascale, quoting Guido Piovene, observes that the newspaper in Italy, through the prominence of its cultural section, has always accommodated a strong literary element. See Gaia De Pascale, *Scrittori in viaggio: narratori e poeti italiani del Novecento in giro per il mondo* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001), p. 236.

writing in canons of Italian literature and scholarly works. Such views further impact upon the production of texts as, in view of the low status of the genre in Italy, writings about travel are less likely to be published, classified and marketed as 'Travel Writing'.

Another possible reason for the Italian literary canon's stubborn resistance to the inclusion of travel writing is offered by Theodore J. Cachey who suggests that an anxiety over the lack of political national union and absence of territorial integrity has been central to Italy's literary tradition for the most part of its history.[38] Outward geographical travel has thus gone against the placelessness which is constitutive of Italian literary identity and is therefore viewed as a betrayal of its ideals. Rather, Cachey argues that the trope of travel, or more precisely that of exile, is at the heart of Italian literature and he points to literary travelling in the works of writers of such fundamental importance as Dante and Petrarch. However, there is a long, if unrecognised, tradition of outward travel and exploration from Italy. As Polezzi notes, Marco Polo's *Milione* (1298) and Columbus's *Diario* (1492-3), although not written in Italian, are considered to be significant archetypes of travel writing.[39]

Though travel writing may not have enjoyed the same status as other kinds of literary production and though the genre may have been obscured by its lack of recognition, many established Italian writers have written as travellers throughout the last century. In 1917, for example, Guido Gozzano published his memories of the journey he made through India in 1912, while Luigi Barzini Snr. published several accounts of his journeys across Europe and Asia.[40] As Polezzi has noted in her analysis of the fortunes of the genre, the 'prosa d'arte' tradition in Italy that remained

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[38] Theodore J. Cachey, Jr., 'An Italian Literary History of Travel', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 14 (1996), 55-64.
[39] Polezzi, *Translating Travel*, pp. 24, 25.
[40] This text is still in print today. Guido Gozzano, *Verso la cuna del mondo. lettere dall'India* (Turin: EDT, 1998) was first published by Treves, Milan 1917.

strong in the 1920s and 1930s was fuelled by an interest in travel and, in the period leading up to the Second World War, writers like Corrado Alvaro, Emilio Cecchi and Giuseppe Ungaretti all published written accounts of their journeys.[41] Expansionism under Mussolini gave a further impetus to travel writing with a huge amount of texts being published on those territories under Italian occupation.[42] In the post-war period, many well-known writers wrote accounts of their journeys to places often of importance in the power struggle of the Cold War. Curzio Malaparte and Alberto Moravia, for example, travelled to the Soviet Union, Guido Piovene visited the United States, while Carlo Cassola and Goffredo Parise made journeys through China.[43] Moravia and Pasolini accompanied each other on a journey to India in 1960-61, each writing their own account of the places that they toured.[44] More recently, writers like Umberto Eco and Gianni Celati have added to the genre.[45] If the definition of travel writing is extended to include works which rely on a greater level of fictionality, then the list of travel writing in Italian would include works such as Italo Calvino's *Le città invisibili* or Antonio Tabucchi's *Notturno indiano*.[46]

The writers that Gaia De Pascale considers in *Scrittori in viaggio* are all male, but a number of important Italian women writers have also written on travel. Before the

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[41] Polezzi, *Translating Travel*, p. 37.

[42] On this subject see Charles Burdett, 'Journeys to Italian East Africa 1936-1941: Narratives of Settlement', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 5:2 (2000), 207-26; and Loredana Polezzi, 'Aristocrats, Geographers, Reporters: Travelling through "Italian Africa" in the 1930s', in *Cultural Encounters: European Travel Writing in the 1930s*, ed. by Charles Burdett and Derek Duncan (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 187-204.

[43] Curzio Malaparte, *Io, in Russia e in Cina* (Florence, Vallecchi, 1962); Alberto Moravia, *Un mese in URSS* (Milan: Bompiani, 1958); Guido Piovene, *De America* (Milan: Garzanti, 1953); Carlo Cassola, *Viaggio in Cina*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1956); Goffredo Parise, *Cara Cina* (Milan: Longanesi, 1966).

[44] Alberto Moravia, *Un'idea dell'India* (Milan: Bompiani, 1962); Pier Paolo Pasolini, *L'odore dell'India* (Milan: Longanesi, 1962). For an account of the journey and the two texts that were to flow from it, see De Pascale, pp. 191-198.

[45] See Umberto Eco, 'Travels in Hyperreality', in *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Minerva), pp. 1-58; Gianni Celati, *Avventure in Africa* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1998).

[46] Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili* (Turin: Einaudi, 1972); Antonio Tabucchi, *Notturno indiano* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1993; 1st edn 1984). On Calvino's travel writing see Polezzi, *Translating Travel*, pp. 164-183.

outbreak of the Second World War, Margherita Sarfatti wrote regularly on travel as a columnist for *La Stampa* and published accounts of her journeys to Tunisia and to the United States.[47] In 1960 Lalla Romano published an evocative account of her journey through Greece that still showed the damages of the War and she later wrote on travels to the former Yugoslavia, Hungary and Scandinavia.[48] The articles that Anna Maria Ortese wrote on travel in the course of her career have recently been collected as a single volume of writing, *La lente scura*.[49] Working as a journalist, Oriana Fallaci published accounts of her travels to Vietnam, the Near East and the United States of America, often travelling to interview important statesmen and women or to report on conflicts such as the Vietnam War, the subject of *Niente e così sia*. In one of her earlier works, *Il sesso inutile*, she focuses on the condition and status of women across the globe, whilst even space travel features in her work *Se il sole muore*.[50] The translations and critical studies by Fernanda Pivano on the Beat generation of American writers draw on the experience of travel and cultural translation, while many of her contributions to newspapers and journals centre on her travels to the United States.[51] In *La nave per Kobe*, Dacia Maraini provides a commentary on her mother's diary of the family's journey to Japan in 1938.[52] In the work *In viaggio*, Fabrizia Ramondino reflects both on memories of particular journeys and on the general experience of travelling and has also written a diary of

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[47] See, for example, Margherita Sarfatti, *L'America. Alla ricerca della felicità* (Milan: Mondadori, 1937).

[48] Romano's travel texts have recently been published in a single volume in 2003 by Einaudi. *Diario di Grecia* was first published by Nuovi Coralli in 1974; *Le lune di Hvar* by Supercoralli in 1991 and *Un sogno del Nord* also by Supercoralli in 1989.

[49] Anna Maria Ortese, *La lente scura: scritti di viaggio* (Milan: Adelphi, 2004).

[50] *Se il sole muore* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1965); *Niente e così sia* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1969); *Il sesso inutile: viaggio intorno alla donna* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1961). For a study of Fallaci as a travel writer see Polezzi, *Translating Travel*, pp. 137-63. See also Alba Amoia and Bettina L. Knapp, eds, *Great Women Travel Writers from 1750 to the Present* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), pp. 255-71.

[51] See Chapter Five of this thesis.

[52] Dacia Maraini, *La nave per Kobe* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001).

the weeks she spent in Southern Algeria, published as *Polisario: un'astronave dimenticata nel deserto.*[53]

Whilst there seems to be no shortage of primary texts in which travel is a major component, there are still relatively few studies which focus on Italian women and travel in the twentieth century, especially when compared to the large body of secondary texts on women and travel that exists within the field of English literature. Although the fourth section of Silvestre and Valerio's *Donne in viaggio* is devoted to contemporary accounts of travel, it focuses on writings of European women such as the Swiss writer, Isabelle Eberhardt, French-born Anaïs Nin, and Spanish philosopher María Zambrano.[54] Studies which do exist address particular forms of movement such as colonial settlement, or else they relate mainly to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[55] Cristina Lombardi-Diop, for example, has published several articles on Italian women in colonial Africa during the Fascist period.[56] Ricciarda Ricorda provides a survey of Italian women's travel writing between 1750 and 1860, including Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso's accounts of her travels in the Near East and Turkey along with Amalia Nizzoli Solla's *Memorie d'Egitto e specialmente su i costumi delle donne orientali e gli Harem* (1941).[57] These women, however, tend to be exceptions, as their travel was facilitated by their privileged

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[53] Fabrizia Ramondino, *In viaggio* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995); *Polisario: un'astronave dimenticata nel deserto* (Rome: Gamberetti, 1997). On this latter work, see Loredana Polezzi, 'Non Solo Colonie: "Africa" in the Work of Contemporary Italian Women Writers', in *Borderlines: migrazioni e identità nel novecento*, ed. by Jennifer Burns and Loredana Polezzi (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone, 2003), pp. 309-21 (pp. 317-20).

[54] *Donne in viaggio*, ed. by Maria Louisa Silvestre and Adriana Valerio (Rome: Laterza, 1999).

[55] Dinora Corsi's collection of conference papers on women's travel writing, *Altrove: viaggi di donne dall'antichità al novecento*, ed. by Dinora Corsi (Rome: Viella, 1999), contains only limited references to twentieth-century travel and then mainly in the context of Italian migration.

[56] See for example, Cristina Lombardi-Diop, 'Mothering the Nation: An Italian woman in Colonial Eritrea', in *ItaliAfrica: Bridging Continents and Cultures*, ed. by Sante Matteo (Stony Brook, New York: Forum Italicum, 2001), pp. 173-91 and 'Pioneering Female Modernity: Fascist Women in Colonial Africa', in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 145-54.

[57] Ricciarda Ricorda, 'Travel Writing, 1750-1860', trans. by Sharon Wood, in *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, ed. by Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 107-19.

social backgrounds; Belgiojoso was born into one of the weathiest families in Lombardy and married a Prince before being exiled for her political activities. Although Ricorda acknowledges that there were comparatively few Italian women travellers in the nineteenth century, she claims that there is nevertheless a rich field for study as women's writing has been marginalised by the canon of Italian literature and women's travel writing in particular has been overlooked by critics. Although women now play an increasingly prominent role in Italian literary production, their writing had long been overlooked by critics which, as Santo L. Aricò explains, was a consequence of gender rather than the any lack of literary talent.[58] Alongside the traditionally low-status of travel writing genre in Italy, women's travel accounts in Italy seem to have suffered from a double-invisibility.

TRAVEL, IDENTITY AND PLACE

The aim of writing about travel, however, is not just to relay information regarding the outside world to an audience back home: clearly the self is a vital part of the process of cultural translation. As Casey Blanton points out, the central question of travel writing is the relationship between the self and the world.[59] Writing on travel balances impersonal information about a foreign place with a developmental narrative which reveals the thoughts and sentiments of the traveller. Its main focus is that of the self in an encounter with the other, yet, the self does not remain unchanged throughout the process. Aside from a journey into an unfamiliar exterior, travel is often regarded as an inner journey, or an exploration into personal identity.

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[58] Santo L. Aricò, 'Introduction', in *Contemporary Women Writers in Italy: A Modern Renaissance*, ed. by Santo L. Arico (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), pp. 3-8. In recent years, women's writing in Italy has been the subject of sustained academic attention. Other critical works include Rita Wilson's *Speculative Identities: Contemporary Italian Women's Narrative* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2000); Sharon Wood, *Italian Women's Writing 1860-1994* (London: Athlone Press, 1995); Carol Lazzaro Weiss, *From Margins to Mainstream: Feminism and Fictional Modes in Italian Women's Writing, 1968-1990* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); and *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, ed. by Panizza and Wood (cited above).

[59] Blanton, p. 29.

The experience and representation of travel raises important questions regarding the self, its connection to place, and its relationship to one's own culture and to that of others. Eric Leed insists that travel 'engenders a collective self-consciousness as it acquaints travellers with the precise nature of their sameness and difference with respect to a world of others'.[60] This process of recognition of sameness and difference is crucial in the construction of identities, both personal and collective. If, as Trinh T. Minh-ha asserts, 'identity is constituted through the process of othering', then travel, with its potential for contact with different cultures and ethnic groups, can serve to consolidate a person's sense of self and sense of belonging to a place.[61] Equally, travel has the potential to disrupt one's sense of self, undermine the foundations of previously constructed identities, and destabilize the notion of belonging to a fixed place. The person who returns from a journey is often changed profoundly by the travel experience which entails holding one's personal beliefs and cultural norms up to closer scrutiny and negotiating one's way through different values systems and signifying practices. Travel, writing on travel, and reading the accounts of other travellers are part of a reflective process which can make us aware of those elements that are important in the construction of the self.

The connection between travel and identity is most evident in the common use of metaphors of travel when describing human existence.[62] Life is frequently referred to as a journey in which the individual has different paths to choose, various obstacles to overcome en route, and never really knows what s/he will encounter around the corner. Metaphors of travel are thus an important way of conceptualizing the self and can be seen as an attempt to impose narrative form and to create meaning out of what

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[60] Leed, p. 20.
[61] Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'Other than Myself/My Other Self', in *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, ed. by George Robertson and others (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 9-26 (p. 18).
[62] See Leed, p. 3.

may otherwise be a random set of events. The concept of the journey also becomes a metaphor for a deeper understanding of the world which extends beyond material existence. As Robyn Davidson notes: 'The metaphor of the journey is embedded in the very way in which we conceive of life – a movement from birth to death, from this world to the next, from ignorance to wisdom.'[63]

Zygmunt Bauman also uses metaphors of travelling subjects to distinguish modern and postmodern approaches to the questions of identity and place.[64] He proposes that whilst the concern of modernity was to construct solid and enduring identities, the postmodern problem of identity is how to avoid being bound and fixed; in other words, how to keep one's options open. Bauman adopts the figure of the pilgrim to embody the modern approach to identity as the pilgrim is a person on a structured journey with a clear sense of purpose and fixed destination. The pilgrimage thus operates as a confirmation of identity, intended to bestow meaning on this life and perpetuate one's existence through to the next. In contrast, Bauman draws on the figures of the stroller, the vagabond and the tourist to illustrate postmodern identities as they reject fixity and boundedness. The stroller and the vagabond avoid being settled in any one place whilst the tourist seeks an escape from the confines of home and searches for new experiences.

Journeys, from the medieval pilgrimage, the grand tour of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the modern-day gap year, mark significant moments in an individual's life and are often seen as rites of passage or denote a coming of age.[65] Numerous studies point to the role of travel in the process of identity formation. Eric Leed notes that, for the ancient hero, the medieval knight, the scientific explorer and

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[63] *The Picador Book of Journeys*, ed. by Robyn Davidson (London: Picador, 2001), p. 4.
[64] Zygmunt Bauman, 'From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity', in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 18-36.
[65] See Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 25.

the Romantics, travel represented an opportunity to demonstrate one's identity as a free and autonomous subject.[66] Sidonie Smith likewise discusses how historically specific forms of travel and modes of narrating travel can be constitutive of identities. For example, the pilgrimage produced the Christian penitent; early modern exploration produced the figure of the intrepid adventurer or the survivalist hero; the grand tour of the eighteenth century reproduced the bourgeois gentleman, who was sent away to get to know the world and his place in the world; and travel and travel narratives during the period of European imperialism helped underpin ideologies of European superiority.[67]

Moving places can enable the traveller to investigate different aspects of the self, to search for other modes of existence, or to discover other possible identities. Travel is about loosening the binds that place has over identity, escaping the confines of home and the restrictions that it imposes. Alice Steinbach in *Without Reservations* expresses her desire to travel in order to throw off fixed categories of identity that had become habitual and thus allowing her to experience other aspects of the self:

> I thought [...] of traveling to an unfamiliar place where all the old labels that define me – both to myself and others – would be absent. Maybe then, somewhere along the way, I would bump into that other woman.[68]

> Over the years I had fallen into the habit – quite a natural one, I believe – of defining myself in terms of who I was to other people and what they expected of me as mother, as daughter, as wife, as ex-wife, as reporter, as friend. For a while at least, I wanted to stand back from these roles and see who emerged.[69]

Like Steinbach, writings on travel frequently propose that their journey is a means to discover a lost, suppressed or as yet undiscovered self. The idea of travel as self-discovery prompted by a desire 'to find oneself' is a common motif in travel narratives. Yet, it is one that implies a particular notion of identity; that is, a belief in

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[66] Leed, pp. 12, 13.
[67] Sidonie Smith, pp. 2-10.
[68] Alice Steinbach, *Without Reservations: The Travels of an Independent Woman* (Sydney: Bantam Books, 2000), p. xvi.
[69] Steinbach, p. xvii.

the existence of an authentic and original self that can be uncovered or discovered through travel, a model of selfhood that has been refuted by poststructuralist theories. In her commentary of Roland Barthes' autobiography, Linda Anderson argues that, for Barthes, 'the essentialized subject, the subject whose depths are waiting to be revealed is an illusion, an ideological construct to be resisted and displaced'.[70]

The attempt to construct an image of coherent self is also the project of autobiography: 'Autobiography engages with a profound human impulse to become both separate and complete.'[71] Indeed, autobiography and writings on travel overlap in many aspects, not least in the identity that they set up between the author, narrator and protagonist which is a characteristic of both genres. Autobiography, like many travel accounts, is a developmental narrative which purports to refer to an external reality – an individual life in the case of autobiography and an individual's journey to a real place in the case of travel writing. Once again, autobiography raises the question of truthfulness, as the constraints of memory and the need to construct an image of a unified self impinge on the narrative process. Liz Stanley, however, refers to the idea that there is an essentially unchanging and unitary self that can be referentially captured as the fallacy of auto/biographical writing.[72] If autobiography is a developmental narrative which attempts to create the illusion of a unified self, then travel writing can be seen as a particular form of autobiographical writing which places the self under investigation through the encounter with another culture and place. Whilst acknowledging the complex processes by which the self is inscribed in the text, Derek Duncan suggests that autobiographical readings can be a productive way of approaching travel writing:

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[70] Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 70.
[71] James Olney, quoted in Anderson, p. 4.
[72] Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Autobiography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 8.

> If travel writing is read as autobiography, bearing in mind all the hazards that such a procedure entails, a more accurate understanding of how narratives of the self are embedded in narratives of place and of how place provides the parameters for self-inscription might be achieved.[73]

In his discussion of identity in relation to autobiography, Paul John Eakin favours the model of plural, embodied and relational selves proposed by the cognitive psychologist Ulric Neisser as this model seems to bridge the divide between essentialist notions of a coherent, unified self and deconstructionist theories of the fictiveness of the subject.[74] Neisser posits five ways of conceptualising the self which include an ecological self (sense of self in space), an interpersonal self (sense of self in human interchange), an extended self (sense of self in time), a private self (sense of a unique self), and a conceptual self (sense of self as a category of being). Undoubtedly, travel has the capacity to disrupt all these modes of selfhood as the traveller moves to an unknown place, engages in interaction with different people, perhaps in a culture which has alternative concepts of the individual and the roles s/he should play in society. Thus travel cannot but have an impact upon the way the individual sees him/herself and his/her relationship to the world. The identity of the travelling subject will provide the main focus of enquiry of this thesis which asks what notions of the self emerge from the writings of Italian women travellers and what role travel and the encounter with difference have on the development of the representation of their subjectivities.

WOMEN AND TRAVEL

The issues that travel writing raises, and in particular the question of how travel impacts on the development of subjectivity as discussed above, are clearly related to the question of gender. As a number of accounts propose, travel, exploration and

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[73] Derek Duncan, 'Travel Writing and Autobiography', in *Cultural Encounters: European Travel Writing in the 1930s*, ed. by Charles Burdett and Derek Duncan (Oxford: Berghahn, 2002), pp. 49-63 (p. 53).

[74] Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 22-5.

discovery are associated with the male adventurer, a daring and heroic figure who overcomes daunting perils and obstacles with skill, ingenuity and courage. Whether a fictional traveller such as Ulysses, or a historical personage such as Marco Polo or Columbus, the archetypal traveller within the Western canon has consistently been portrayed as a male figure. In literary accounts, more often than not, it is the male who leaves the familiar environment of the home and moves out in search of the exotic and unfamiliar. In contrast, the female figure in literature is often represented as being confined to the familiar and domestic sphere where she waits patiently for the man to return. Karen Lawrence in *Penelope Voyages* argues that women in narratives serve as the symbolic embodiment of home, as in the case of Penelope, whilst other female figures, such as Circe, are used to represent the foreign other.[75] The female figure in literature becomes therefore both the point of departure and the object of male travel, but her role remains passive; she has rarely been portrayed as an active participant in the journey.

Virginia Woolf famously stated that a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write.[76] Woolf's comments on women and travel are less well-known but equally relevant to this discussion as they point to movement between spaces and the encounter with others as a possible font of inspiration and creative expression that had been denied to many women writers. Referring to Jane Austin and the position of women in early nineteenth-century England, Woolf writes: 'It was impossible for a woman to go about alone. She never travelled; she never drove through London in an omnibus or had luncheon in a shop by herself.'[77] According to Woolf, women's limited experience of the outside world at that time muted their

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[75] Karen Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p.1.
[76] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin, 2000; 1st edn 1928), p. 6.
[77] Woolf, p. 69.

literary production. She invites the reader to speculate on how the writing of Charlotte Brontë would have benefited 'if experience and intercourse and travel had been granted her'. But, she laments, 'they were not granted; they were withheld'.[78] Mary Morris, however, in her article on women and journeys, reflects on the changing social realities that have made travel accessible for many women. She begins with John Gardner's claim that there are only two plots in literature: you go on a journey or the stranger comes to town. Morris contends that for many years women were consigned to a position of powerlessness in which the journey was denied them, thus their only option was to wait at home for the stranger to arrive. Morris proclaims that now the other half of the plot is open to women: we can go on a journey or we can be the stranger who comes to town.[79]

At least within the context of English literature, the growing corpus of work pertaining to women's travel attests to the fact that a considerable number of women were able to break down and overcome social obstacles in order to both travel and write. As the nineteenth century progressed towards the zenith of British imperial rule, there were increased opportunities for travel for both men and women. Women travelled as wives of diplomats and soldiers, others as independent travellers, as tourists, explorers and scientists. *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers* (1989) by Dea Birkett, herself a travel writer, contains the writings of numerous women who travelled during this period.[80] Jane Robinson's *Wayward Women* (1990) and its companion volume, *Unsuitable for Ladies* (1994), are two collections of selected

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[78] Woolf, p. 70.
[79] Mary Morris, 'Women and Journeys: Inner and Outer', in *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel*, ed. by Michael Kowalewski (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), pp. 25-31.
[80] Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

writings by women travellers which illustrate the diverse nature of women's travel.[81] On the evidence of over a thousand travel texts by women which Robinson claims to have read, she concludes:

> There are precious few corners of this globe that, if they have been visited by foreign travellers at all, have not been visited by women; no difficulty that has not been met and usually overcome by these same women, whether physical or emotional, real or imagined; and no domestic situation that has not been carefully and constructively considered.[82]

The feminist press Virago has also played a prominent role in the reprinting and publishing of women's travel writing. In 1982 the 'Virago Travellers' series was launched with the publication of *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* by Isabella Bird and *Travels in West Africa* by Mary Kingsley. Virago went on to reprint the stories of the journeys of some of what have become well-known travellers such as Gertrude Bell, Lucie Duff Gordon, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. In 1996 they released a collection of women's travel accounts in *The Virago Book of Women Travellers*. Other anthologies have been published in recent years, notably Foster and Mills' *An Anthology of Women's Travel Writing* (2002) which includes the selected writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, Freya Stark, Dervla Murphy, Flora Tristan, Alexandra David-Neel, Rebecca West and Anna Jameson.

The primary focus of many studies and anthologies, however, tends to be middle-class British and American women writing in the nineteenth century. Although Foster and Mills claim to have selected texts for their diversity, they too admit that the vast majority of travel accounts included in their anthology are written by nineteenth-century middle-class women.[83] In *Penelope Voyages*, Karen R. Lawrence also focuses on 'travel narratives written by white, aristocratic or middle-class

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[81] See Jane Robinson, *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), and *Unsuitable for Ladies: An Anthology of Women Travellers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
[82] Robinson, *Unsuitable for Ladies*, p. xv.
[83] See Foster and Mills, pp. 18, 92, 95, 178.

English women'.[84] Even outside of British and American academic institutions, many studies on women and travel centre on Anglophone writing. *Travel Writing and the Female Imaginary* for example, consists of nine critical essays on women's travel texts – six of which are British and the others Irish, American and Australian.[85] It is therefore inevitable that the theoretical approaches and studies that the thesis has referred to thus far, and even those that address Italian travel writing, approach the question of travel from a predominantly Anglo-American perspective.

One of the studies which has been most influential in opening up research on travel writing and gender is Sara Mills' *Discourses of Difference* which analyses a series of texts by women travellers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century including Alexandra David-Neel, Mary Kingsley and Nina Mazuchelli. Mills' theoretical framework combines feminist and postcolonial studies with Michel Foucault's theories of discourse to argue that the texts she addresses arise from women's complex negotiation of the multiple discursive conditions at the time of writing, most notably those of colonialism and femininity:

> It is in their struggle with the discourses of imperialism and femininity, neither of which they could wholeheartedly adopt, and which pulled them in different directions, that their writing exposes the unsteady foundations on which it is based.[86]

Mills does not adopt an essentialist view of women's writing in her work as she acknowledges both the heterogeneity of women's travel accounts and also the similarities that they sometimes share with male-authored accounts. She argues, however, that any differences between male-authored and female-authored accounts arise from different discursive constraints which not only impact upon the way women write and what they can write about, but also have a bearing on publication and reception of the texts. Mills shows how fixed ideas regarding the respective roles

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[84] Lawrence, p. xii.
[85] *Travel Writing and the Female Imaginary*, ed. by Vita Fortunati and others (Bologna: Patron, 2001).
[86] Mills, p. 3.

of the sexes at the time influenced not only what it was deemed acceptable for women to do, but also restricted the topics about which they could write. The gendering of subject matter in this way meant that certain topics were deemed more 'feminine' than others and, as a result, women were less likely to engage in public debates on scientific and political issues, showing a preference in their texts for descriptions of domestic interiors over landscapes and focusing on culinary habits, dress codes and local traditions.[87]

> A woman writer in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who ventured into the 'masculine' side of literary activity, whether through the use of political or scientific discourse, was to a considerable extent risking her secure gendered position.[88]

Various theorists have pointed out that the language, imagery, and narrative positions available to women writers are also gendered. Mills claims that women travellers in the late nineteenth century were limited in their choice of subject position and narrative figure as they could not easily adopt the imperialist voice or identify with the tropes of the bold adventurer or the intrepid explorer which featured strongly in male-authored texts of the period.[89] Susan Bassnett highlights that the language used to describe colonialism is itself overtly sexualised, containing images of virgin lands waiting to be penetrated and husbanded by the male explorer. Similar descriptions apply to experiences of travel in which whole areas of the globe have been sexualised by travel writers, with the northern regions often being presented as masculine and the Orient as feminine.[90] Mary Morris likewise points to the similarities between the language of male sexual conquest and travel.[91]

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[87] Shirley Foster and Sara Mills, 'Women and Knowledge: Introduction', in *An Anthology of Women's Travel Writing*, ed. by Shirley Foster & Sara Mills (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 87-97.
[88] Foster & Mills, p. 89.
[89] Mills, pp. 3, 22.
[90] Susan Bassnett, 'Travel Writing and Gender', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 225-41 (pp. 231, 239).
[91] Morris, p. 25.

Women's awareness of the discursive parameters of gender is further demonstrated by their frequent use of disclaimers and reference to authoritative (male) sources when addressing political or scientific matters. Monica Anderson's *Women and the Politics of Travel, 1870 – 1914* which focuses on the same period addressed by Mills, represents an attempt to explode the myth that travel accounts by women were simply poor copies of their male-authored originals.[92] As the titles of the aforementioned anthologies indicate in their deliberate adoption of the stereotypes of 'spinster' and 'wayward woman', women travellers were often considered odd or exceptional. For centuries, travel for women was considered to present a moral danger as those who did travel were flouting traditional gender roles and lone women travellers especially were judged as eccentric, or associated with promiscuity.[93] Foster & Mills argue that in order to counter societal unease and criticism surrounding women travellers, women writers adopted certain textual strategies which included a 'stern refusal to describe fear, sexual attack or danger', and asserting the femininity of the narrator by emphasising their modest conduct and lady-like clothing.[94]

Representations of Travel and Displacement

The thesis aims to contribute to a body of work that prises travel away from its masculinist paradigms. Extending the concept of travel by addressing a range of practices that include colonial settlement, migration, tourism and travel for journalistic purposes, it looks at how Italian women in the recent past have written on

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[92] Monica Anderson, *Women and the Politics of Travel, 1870 – 1914* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006).

[93] See Kristi Siegel for a discussion on how the perils of women's travel are embedded in consciousness through traditional fairytales and myths which warn against women 'straying from the path'. Kristi Siegel, 'Women's Travel and the Rhetoric of Peril', in *Gender, Genre, and Identity in Women's Travel Writing*, ed. by Kristi Siegel (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 55-72.

[94] Foster and Mills, p. 174.

their experiences of travel and displacement. Each chapter therefore addresses a different category of traveller and moves to a different geographical location, with each place holding a particular significance for the nature of its political, commercial or cultural links with Italy: East Africa was the main site of Italy's attempt at imperial aggrandisement; Argentina, for a time, represented an utopian dream in the minds of Italian migrants; China, too, represented an important commercial link with the granting of an Italian concession in Tianjin; India's role as exotic other in the popular imagination is revealed in a series of literary accounts of travel while, in the present, the Near East represents a site of military engagement and ongoing political tension.

The methodology through which categories of traveller and locations of travel are addressed derives, broadly speaking, from post-structuralist approaches to the question of identity. Following the insights of Edward W. Said and others into the cultural construction of self and other, the thesis attempts to look at the writings of women travellers as texts in which the author assumes a series of subject positions within a range of inter-connected discourses.[95] The thesis asks what notions of self emerge from recent accounts of travel by Italian women and focuses on the role that movement between cultures plays in the representation of subjectivity. It explores different aspects of identity construction: it looks at the role that memory serves in the development of a sense of self and how far childhood memories can be interrogated by the adult writing self; it considers identity not as an essence but as a series of performative acts and practices; it considers identity formation as a

[95] Said in *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003, 1st ed. 1978), argues that the Orient is constituted within western consciousness through a series of representations and discourses of the East. On the use of Orientalist discourse as an instrument of imperial power and on the construction and use of racial stereotypes to fix the other as object of knowledge, see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) and *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990).

relational process and it explores the ways in which the traveller interacts with the outside world, with both people and places.[96]

It thus explores the connections between personal identity and place, whether this is the travellers' place of origin (home) or destination (away). Susan Bassnett suggests that 'accounts of journeys can also show us things about the way in which travellers perceive their place in the world they inhabit'.[97] Such an assertion prompts a series of questions relating to travel, place and identity: How do the protagonists develop a sense of place as a site of connectedness and belonging? How does the traveller position herself within wider categories of belonging including those of national identity? Bassnett further proposes that accounts of foreign places can be read as a mirror onto the home culture: 'From travellers' accounts of their journeys, we can trace the presence of cultural stereotypes, and the way in which an individual reacts to what is seen elsewhere can reflect tendencies in the travellers' home culture.'[98] Whether their writings simply reiterate cultural, racial and religious stereotypes or present a challenge to such notions indicates how the writer positions herself vis-à-vis her home culture. An examination of the way in which these writers represent the others with whom they come into contact can expose more clearly their own ideas of self and their views of Italy.

The first chapter of the thesis examines memories of colonial life in East Africa and centres on the semi-autobiographical writing of Erminia Dell'Oro. Whilst acknowledging that travel writing is a global and varied phenomenon and is by no

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[96] On memory see Ian M. L. Hunter, *Memory* (London: Penguin Books, 1957) and Nicola King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000). On identity as performance see Jonathan Culler, 'Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative', *Poetics Today* 21:3 (2000), 503-19; and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999; 1st edn 1990), especially pp. 171-80. On travellers as readers of signs see Culler, 'The Semiotics of Tourism'.

[97] Susan Bassnett, 'Constructing Cultures: The Politics of Travellers' Tales', in *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 92-114 (p. 94).

[98] Bassnett, p. 93.

means limited to European cultures, Jim Philip has suggested that travel writing is at its most practised and widely read within cultures with a long history of commercial involvement and political control over others and as such is tied up with the history of colonialism.[99] Colonial travel and settlement is just one way of encountering another culture, but one that sets up a particular relationship between the traveller and destination culture. This form of travel was not generally characterised by a yearning for knowledge and exchange with the outside world, but rather prompted by ideas of racial or cultural superiority with the intention of transposing a European way of life onto a foreign land.

Although Italy's period of colonial expansion was relatively brief (from 1890 to 1943), it is still recent enough to feature in the memories of contemporary Italian writers and therefore represents an important location in accounts of life outside the Italian peninsula. Italy's former colonies occupy a problematic space within the writing of Italians who were born and raised in East Africa as they represent both a lost childhood home and a particularly aggressive moment of Italian history. Travel writing is one way in which travellers today are able to confront the thorny question of their country's colonial past. Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs point out the role that travel writing can play in challenging prevalent views of other cultures and especially in undermining colonial discourses:

> Travel writing remains a useful medium for the interrogation of ethnocentrism and for the displacement or estrangement of received ideas about 'other' cultures. Nostalgia holds the balance between these conflicting ideological purposes: first by displacing the desire for domination and conquest onto 'benign' mythologies of loss or remembered pleasure; and second, by allowing for a critical reading of these self-serving mythologies and mechanisms of displacement.[100]

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[99] Jim Philip, 'Reading Travel Writing', in *Recasting the World: Writing after Colonialism*, ed. by Jonathan White (Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University Press 1993), pp. 241-55 (p. 242).
[100] Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs, 'Introduction', in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, ed. by Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 1-12.

Some travellers undertake journeys back to places with which they feel they have a personal connection, whether a result of their own experience of living in a former colony or a family history of residence abroad. Their writing can reflect a wish to hold onto pleasurable memories whilst at the same time providing a critical perspective on western colonial expansion, which at times may clash with the dominant attitudes of their community. The writings of Erminia Dell'Oro, the focus of the first chapter of the thesis, provide a case in point. *Asmara addio* (1988) and *La Gola del Diavolo* (1999) are both set in the former Italian colony of Eritrea and relate the experiences of a young girl of Italian origin growing up in the city of Asmara.[101] *Asmara addio* (1988) comprises different forms of travel, including colonial settlement, the protagonist's migration to Italy as an adult, followed by return journeys to visit the country of her birth. This first chapter compares Dell'Oro's representation of colonial space with that of one of her contemporaries, Marisa Baratti, whose memories of life in the Italy colony have been published as *Era una volta il... : Ricordi d'Eritrea dal 1919 al 1989.*[102]

These texts reveal how memories of the past are bound up with subjectivities in the present. Kowalewski claims that 'home is where a traveller has a history and a sense of connectedness with familiar landscapes and cultural mores'.[103] What happens then, when this connection is broken? Where does the writer locate herself when she finds that the place she had called home actually belongs to someone else? What are the consequences of this form of displacement on identity? The chapter examines these questions in the light of theoretical studies on memory by scholars including Ian Hunter, Paul John Eakin and Lawrence Kirmayer. It considers how far

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[101] Erminia Dell'Oro, *Asmara addio* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1997; 1st edn. 1988); Erminia Dell'Oro, *La Gola del Diavolo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999).
[102] Marisa Baratti, *Era una volta il... Ricordi d'Eritrea dal 1919 al 1989* (Milan: Montedit, 2003).
[103] Kowalewski, p. 14.

the re-workings of memory that are presented in these works can be said to challenge nostalgic ideas of colony as a lost paradise. It shows how different genres, structures and narrative voices are used to give form to memories and discusses the bearing that these textual features have on the writers' ability to reconcile their largely positive memories of childhood with their adult knowledge of history.

Following on from one of the major questions to emerge from the first chapter, the second chapter focuses on the representation of home in the writings of Italian women migrants to South America. Although this chapter presents a different category of traveller (that of the migrant), and another geographical location (South America), the focus remains on the identity of the traveller and the importance of place in conceptualisations of the self. The chapter examines a small part of the wider phenomenon of Italian outward migration during the first half of the twentieth century, which for many women of the period represented one of the few opportunities for travel. Laura Pariani's *Quando Dio ballava il tango* (2002) is a fictionalised account of women migrants in Argentina which is loosely based on research into the author's own family history.[104] It is an intricate collage of the lives of sixteen female protagonists which reveals, from a female perspective, the impact of outward migration on an entire community. Like the names in the telephone directory of Buenos Aires in Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia*, it tells 'a story of exile, disillusion and anxiety behind lace curtains'.[105] The chapter then moves on to examine the personal memoirs of three Italian women from different cultural backgrounds who either migrated to or travelled extensively in South America: Carlina Lorenzini's *Il ritorno* (1998), *Oxalà* (1998) by Maria Antoinetta Sartoris

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[104] Laura Pariani, *Quando Dio ballava il tango* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002).
[105] Bruce Chatwin, *In Patagonia* (London: Vintage, 2005; 1st edn. 1977), p. 5.

Garetto and *Quando le ombre si allungano* (2000) by Pia Ferrante.[106] These three texts are not written by established authors; instead they are unpublished memoirs from *L'Archivio Diaristico Nazionale* in Pieve Santo Stefano (Arezzo) and were submitted to the archive for entry in an annual competition. These texts offer a glimpse into the phenomenon of Italian migration and how Italian women have written on the experience of migration and the trauma of leaving home.

Home and away are often thought of as antithetical terms, with departure and homecoming as the beginning and end points of a journey. Yet, as this second chapter shows, traces of home permeate writings of away. Travel too is tied up with the various meanings attached to home, meanings which are both varied and unstable. Home can signify security, a place of origins and site of belonging, but it can equally come to represent confinement and stagnation. The varying experiences of home thus impact on the desire to travel outside the boundaries of the home and, of course, the likelihood of returning to it. Following Madan Sarup's assertion that the concept of home is bound up with notions of identity, this chapter examines the impact moving away from home has on subjectivity.[107] It analyses the way in which houses, domestic space and homes are represented in the above texts, asking where home is located and the bearing that nostalgia for a lost home has on the migrant's subject positioning within the host culture. It shows how the writers make sense of their displacement through the telling of their story and how metaphors of home are woven into the fabric of the text to reveal the psychological impact of migration on these women.

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[106] Carlina Lorenzini, *Il ritorno* (Pieve Santo Stefano, AR: Archivio Diaristico, 1998); Maria Antonietta Garetto, *Oxalà* (Pieve Santo Stefano, AR: Archivio Diaristico, 1998); Pia Ferrante, *Quando le ombre si allungano* (Pieve Santo Stefano, AR: Archivio Diaristico, 2000).

[107] Madan Sarup, 'Home and identity', in *Traveller's Tales. Narratives of Home and Displacement*, ed. by George Robertson and others (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 93-104 (p. 95).

The writer I discuss in Chapter Three shares many similarities with the women in the first two chapters. Bamboo Hirst's *Blu Cina* (2005) is an autobiographical text which centres on travel and displacement and is essentially concerned with the identity of its authorial voice.[108] Like Erminia Dell'Oro, whose novels comment on Italian involvement in Africa, Hirst's texts weave a public history of Italy's wartime relationship with China into a personal history of travel and migration. Her journey too is circular and the final section of *Blu Cina* is an account of return to the land of her birth. Like the migrant women in Chapter Two, her writing brings to the fore the impact of displacement on cultural belonging. Displacement in *Blu Cina* is represented as a laceration which is reflected in the narrative structure of the text and its representations of space. However, Bamboo Hirst differs from the aforementioned women in one important respect. As a biracial child who grew up in Catholic orphanages in China and in Italy, Hirst has no place to call home. She feels alienated from both Chinese and Italian culture describing herself as 'ovunque straniera' and 'straniera in Cina e straniera in Italia'.[109] *Blu Cina* documents her sense of existing in an in-between space, which is internalised as a fractured self. For Hirst, home is not a fixed location or point of origin, it has to be constructed.

This third chapter draws on theorists of the performative such as Judith Butler and Jacques Derrida and shows how, for Hirst, cultural identity is not an expression of an interior essence but is an ongoing process of becoming. It shows how the divided self is reflected textually and how the sense of division is partially overcome through a performative construction of cultural identity. As she travels between cultures, Hirst develops a heightened awareness of the sign systems in operation in each culture which she is able to manipulate in order to craft her own subject

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[108] Bamboo Hirst, *Blu Cina* (Casale Monferrato, AL: Piemme, 2005).
[109] Bamboo Hirst, *Blu Cina*, pp. 255, 250.

position. The journey therefore becomes a journey into self-consciousness during which Hirst becomes aware of the processes by which identities are constructed, as well as their limitations. Her writing advocates a position of hybridity akin to Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *mestiza* consciousness.

Chapter Four discusses three different representations of journeys through India: Sandra Petrignani's *Ultima India*, Francesca De Carolis's *India: appunti di viaggio*, and Alessandra Borghese's *Ritorno in India: diario di viaggio*.[110] All three writers share a preoccupation with the religious aspects of the culture through which they travel and their journeys centre on encounters with spiritual leaders and visits to shrines, temples and churches. The chapter explores the motivations behind their itineraries and the structural affinities that their journeys share with pilgrimage. It argues that, in their representation of a quest for origins and authenticity in a world at threat from forces of globalization, their journeys constitute a rejection of western society, its religious frameworks and its ways of conceptualising the self. Yet, their travels lead to a consciousness of the contingency of linguistic, societal and cultural constructions of reality and a realisation of the impossibility of escaping the boundaries of western thought.

As these chapters demonstrate, travel writing finds its expression in a variety of genres and features different categories of travelling subject. As Loredana Polezzi's study of Italian travel writing in English translation indicates, Italian writings about travel have always been closely associated with the journalistic tradition.[111] My fifth chapter, therefore, could be considered a return to origins as the final category of identity and generic tradition that the thesis addresses is that of the female journalist

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[110] Sandra Petrignani, *Ultima India* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1996); Francesca De Carolis, *India: appunti di viaggio* (Rome: Fermento, 2004) Alessandra Borghese, *Ritorno in India: diario di viaggio* (Casale Monferrato, AL: Piemme, 2006).
[111] Loredana Polezzi, *Translating Travel*, p. 14.

and foreign correspondence from the Near East. The three women on which this chapter focuses, Lilli Gruber, Giuliana Sgrena and Oriana Fallaci, are or were prominent public figures who, through their connections with the mass media, television broadcasts, newspaper articles and other publications, have access to a wide audience. In this sense it could be argued that the accounts of their journeys are the most influential of all the texts I discuss in shaping public opinion of other cultures. As with the other women, their writings reveal much about Italy's political involvement with other countries. Moreover, their construction of an Islamic other is particularly important at a time of increased tension between the West and the Islamic Near East. Anxieties surrounding Islam are particularly high in Italy, not just because of the tragic events of 9/11 and their global repercussions, but also because Italy has become a destination culture for migrants from North Africa and the Balkans, many of whom are Muslim.[112]

Despite these writers purporting to tell the truth about an external reality, with some more than others insisting on their objectivity, a strong sense of authorial voice surfaces in their texts. Each account exposes the writer's self-perception as a public figure, an independent thinker, an experienced traveller and journalist with particular political allegiances. The chapter argues that the sense of self and sense of Italian identity which emerges from each text determines how the writer perceives the reality through which she travels, framing her reaction to the Islamic cultures she visits and shaping the way in which she translates them back to an Italian public.

As outlined above, the thesis thus offers five case studies of different categories of traveller in different geographical locations. Yet, despite the organisation of the thesis into such categories, it does not attempt to make universal or essentialist

[112] Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy*, p. 11.

claims regarding Italian women travellers and the way they write about travel. According to the Italian feminist philosopher, Adriana Cavarero, the narration of one's life story is an expression of a unique and unrepeatable self: 'Her life story, before bearing witness to the historical typology of a class or condition of women, puts into words, above all, the uniqueness of her personal identity.'[113] The interest in the accounts of travel that I examine lies in the unique existent that is revealed through the narration, or desire for narration, of that journey. It is through these individual accounts and unique life stories that I explore the impact of travel on personal identity. Furthermore, the texts that I address have various degrees of prominence: at one end of the scale are those that have achieved wide circulation, received considerable critical attention and been nominated for literary prizes and at the other end are private and unpublished memoirs. Yet, as Cavarero again insists, life stories do not have to be exceptional to be unique.[114] Each text I address reveals a unique trajectory and unique human being who, as she traverses geographical confines and cultural boundaries, is continually redefining her relationship with the outside world.

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[113] Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. by Paul A. Kottman (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 71.
[114] Cavarero, p. 70.

CHAPTER 1

Revisiting Italy's Colonial Past: Erminia Dell'Oro's Representations of Eritrea

INTRODUCTION: REMEMBERING THE COLONIAL PAST

Travels in the present involve travelling through a world which bears the mark of the colonial past. Travel to former colonies involves confronting a space which has been changed through contact with other cultures and such journeys prompt, to a greater or lesser extent, reflections on the impact of colonialism and the traveller's implication within colonial and postcolonial structures of power and domination. Indeed, the development of the travel writing genre and most notably the increase of texts by women travellers are directly linked to colonial expansion which both facilitated travel and made it socially acceptable for many women.[1] This is especially true in the context of the corpus of travel writing in English, the expansion of which coincided with the height of British imperialism. Some women, such as Mary Kingsley (1862-1900) travelled alone, whilst others such as Beryl Markham (1902-1986), Emily Eden (1797-1869) and Fanny Parks (1794-1875) travelled with their families, as relatives of diplomats, military personnel and colonial administrators. Travels to former colonial spaces also form a major part of the writings of contemporary women travel writers such as Dea Birkett, Sarah Lloyd and Dervla Murphy.

In recent decades the colonial encounter has been the focus of many critical studies on women's travel narratives, for example Indira Ghose's *Women Travellers in Colonial*

[1] Foster and Mills, p. 173.

India: the Power of the Female Gaze[2] and Cheryl McEwan's *Gender, Geography and Empire: Victorian Women Travellers in Africa.*[3] These works examine not only the specificity of the female gaze but also show how other factors such as race and class intersect to produce a diverse body of writing. They show what the texts reveal about the roles and position of women within colonial hierarchies, their relationship with colonized subjects and women's collusion with the imperial mission. In *Discourses of Difference: Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* Sara Mills suggests that, until recently, the writings of women who travelled to colonial spaces have been viewed as simply the accounts of individual women's experiences, thus overlooking their involvement within the imperial enterprise and the role their writing plays in subverting or contributing to the discursive frameworks of the colonial period.[4] Jane Haggis makes a similar point regarding sociological research relating to women in colonial societies, claiming that such studies tend to concentrate on aspects of women's lives rather than analysing their role within the colonial system. She highlights the class and ethnocentric bias evident in many accounts by feminist scholars and calls for studies which recognise both colonizing and indigenous women as active subjects in the construction of colonial gender and race relations.[5] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty have likewise claimed that western feminist criticism often ignores women's own relationship to hegemonic political and economic structures which operate between the West and the non-West, tending either to include all women as part of an oppressed

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[2] Indira Ghose, *Women Travellers in Colonial India: the Power of the Female Gaze* (Delhi, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[3] Cheryl McEwan, *Gender, Geography and Empire: Victorian Women Travellers in Africa* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).
[4] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 199.
[5] Jane Haggis, 'Gendering Colonialism or Colonising Gender? Recent Women's Studies Approaches to White Women and the History of British Colonialism', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13: 1/2 (1995), 105-15.

group or to create a monolithic non-western Other.[6] Women's representations of colonial travel and settlement should thus be viewed as part of a body of texts which actively contribute to discursive constructions of gender, class and race, rather than be taken as isolated examples of women's lives. In addition, these travel texts engage with a significant period of world history and as such they also contribute to historical discourses of colonialism, impacting upon how the colonial past is remembered.

Italy's colonial history is now the subject of critical attention by scholars in Italy and abroad.[7] Italy's colonial possessions were of course far more restricted and the period of colonial expansion far shorter than that of other imperial powers such as Britain or France. Although there had been an Italian trading presence in East Africa since 1869, Italy officially proclaimed Eritrea as its first colony in 1890 and seized Libya in 1911.[8] Following the invasion of Ethiopia and capture of Addis Ababa in 1936, Mussolini declared the Italian Empire of East Africa, a territory including Ethiopia, Eritrea and annexed regions of Somalia. On the eve of World War II there were some 300,000 Italians living in Africa.[9] The Italian imperial phase was short-lived as Italian forces were defeated in East Africa by British troops in 1941 and were also ousted from Libya after the Allied defeat of Axis powers in North Africa in 1943.

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[6] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism', *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1 (Autumn 1985), 243-61; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and others (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 51-80.

[7] For a discussion of the reasons behind the previous lack of critical debate surrounding the colonial period see Angelo Del Boca, 'The Myths, Suppressions, Denials, and Defaults of Italian Colonialism', in *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, ed. by Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 17-36.

[8] For the history of Italian colonialism see Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale: dall'unità alla marcia su Roma* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1976) and Silvana Palma, *L'Italia coloniale* (Rome: Riuniti, 1999). On Eritrea see Tekeste Negash, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882-1941: Policies, Praxis and Impact* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1987). On the imperial phase and its demise see Angelo Del Boca, 'L'Impero', in *I luoghi della memoria: simboli e miti dell'Italia unita*, ed. by Mario Isnenghi (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1996), pp. 417-37.

[9] Palma, p. 20.

The majority of settlers in the Italian colonies were men and it is not surprising therefore that most of the documents relating to the colonial experience, whether historical, literary or anthropological, are male-authored texts.[10] Yet, women did travel to and settle in the spaces of the former Italian colonies and their writings raise important questions regarding the role and identity of Italian women in colonial Africa. In recent years there has been a growing interest in the literary representations of Italian women living through the experience of colonialism. Current work in this field includes Cristina Lombardi-Diop's analysis of Rosalia Pianavia Vivaldi's travel narrative, *Tre anni in Eritrea* and her discussion of women writers living in the Italian colonies during the 1930s.[11] Lombardi-Diop focuses on female subjectivity in the writings by Italian women in colonial Africa arguing that the texts are different from, yet complementary to male-authored texts in that they show complicity with colonial discourses and demonstrate the role women played in policing the sexual and racial politics of empire. Recent articles by Loredana Polezzi discuss how postcolonial women writers relate to the colonial past and how Africa is represented and identities articulated in the writings of women who travelled in East Africa when it was still under Italian rule.[12]

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[10] At the turn of the twentieth century, women represented only one in five of the Italian population of Eritrea, though almost half of these were children under the age of fifteen. Census figures also show that by 1931 the number of women had increased to forty percent. See Barbara Sòrgoni, *Parole e corpi: antropologia, discorso giuridico e politiche sessuali interrazziali nella colonia Eritrea 1980-1941* (Naples: Liguori, 1998), p. 29.

[11] On Rosalia Pianavia Vivaldi's *Tre anni in Eritrea* (1901) see Cristina Lombardi-Diop 'Mothering the Nation', pp. 173-91. On women writers during 1930s, see Cristina Lombardi-Diop 'Pioneering Female Modernity', pp. 145-54.

[12] See Loredana Polezzi, 'The Mirror and the Map: Italian Women Writing the Colonial Space', *Italian Studies* 61:2 (2006), 191-205; 'Mixing Mother Tongues: Language, Narrative and the Spaces of Memory in Postcolonial Works by Italian Women Writers (Part 1)', *Romance Studies* 24:2 (2006), 149-57; 'Non Solo Colonie: "Africa" in the Work of Contemporary Italian Women Writers', in *Borderlines: migrazioni e identità nel novecento*, ed. by Jennifer Burns and Loredana Polezzi (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone, 2003), pp. 309-21. 'The Mirror and the Map' examines the representation of public and private spaces in writings of women who travelled in East Africa during the early phase of colonial settlement and under Fascism. 'Non Solo Colonie' focuses on three contemporary women writers, Erminia Dell'Oro, Franca Cavagnoli

The writings of Erminia Dell'Oro (1938-) are amongst the most well-known of contemporary representations of life in colonial Eritrea. Dell'Oro was born into an Italian family of Jewish background living in Eritrea when it was an Italian colony. Her paternal grandfather had been amongst the waves of early settlers to arrive in the colony in the last decade of the nineteenth century.[13] Her family were therefore well-established members of Asmaran society and Dell'Oro spent her childhood and adolescent years in a relatively privileged and protected colonial environment. At twenty years of age, she moved to Italy to study journalism. She now lives in Milan but has maintained contact with residents of Eritrea and returns frequently to the land of her birth. Her writing is dominated by her early experiences in Africa and many of her works are set in Eritrea reflecting both on her childhood memories and Italy's relationship with its former colonial possessions. The importance of Eritrea for Dell'Oro in her writing has been noted by various commentators. Brigitte Le Gouez notes that, although Dell'Oro writes for an Italian audience, her gaze comes from Africa in contrast to writers such as Tobino, Flaiano and Cecchi who gaze onto Africa from outside.[14] Similarly, Erica

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and Fabrizia Ramondino, and their relationship to the colonial past. 'Mixing Mother Tongues' discusses the relationship between personal and collective memories of colonialism with particular reference to linguistic and narrative choices in the autobiographical writings of Erminia Dell'Oro, Marinette Pendola, Shirin Ramzanali Fazel and Ribka Sibhatu.

[13] For biographical information on Erminia Dell'Oro see Erica Johnson, *Home, Maison, Casa: The Politics of Location in works by Jean Rhys, Marguerite Duras and Erminia Dell'Oro* (Madison-Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), pp. 171-72; and Brigitte Le Gouez, 'L'Africa di Erminia Dell'Oro', *Narrativa* 14 (1998), 309-26 (in particular pp. 309-10). See also 'Erminia Dell'Oro: Biografia', *El-Ghibli*, December 2003:
<http://www.el-ghibli.provincia.bologna.it/index.php?id=2&issue=00_02&sezione=2> [accessed 30 January 2007];
'Erminia Dell'Oro: Note biografiche' <http://www.pesaro.com/erminia/vita.html> [accessed 29 September 2007];
'Biografia: Erminia Dell'Oro' <http://www.zam.it/home.php?id_autore=790> [accessed 29 September 2007]

[14] Brigitte Le Gouez, 'L'Africa di Erminia Dell'Oro', p. 316.

Johnson proposes the term *terragraphica* to denote a homelike place from which to write and shows how Eritrea functions as a *terragraphica* for Dell'Oro.[15]

This chapter focuses on two of Dell'Oro's works of semi-autobiographical fiction, both set in Eritrea, *Asmara addio* (1988) and *La Gola del Diavolo* (1999).[16] These texts encompass colonial settlement, migration to Italy and return journeys to Eritrea and show how the memory of the colonial experience is centrally concerned with questions of personal identity and belonging; how the past is remembered, or indeed forgotten, and the impact this has on identities in the present. The very generic status of these semi-autobiographical novels foregrounds the links between personal memory, history and fiction. Indeed, the blurring of boundaries between fact and fantasy is typical of many accounts of travel. Dell'Oro's ability to weave personal memories into public histories raises further questions regarding the nature of personal memory, its relationship to community memory and to a nation's sense of its own history.

Dell'Oro's writing is of significance as it forms part of a body of texts which actively participate in the construction of Italy's colonial memory in the twenty-first century.[17] In an interview for *El-Ghibli*, an electronic journal on migration literature, Dell'Oro claims that her writing developed from a need to address what she perceived as a lack of awareness regarding Italy's colonial past: 'Arrivata in Italia mi ero accorta che quasi nessuno conosceva la storia delle colonie Italiane in Africa. Era una fetta del

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[15] Erica Johnson, pp. 27-28.

[16] Erminia Dell'Oro, *Asmara addio* and *La Gola del Diavolo* are referred to henceforth as *Asmara* and *Gola*. Dell'Oro's other novels include *L'abbandono: una storia Eritrea* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991), *Il fiore di Merara* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1994) and *Mamme al vento* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1996), in addition to various children's stories.

[17] Derek Duncan, 'Italian Identity and the Risks of Contamination: The Legacies of Mussolini's Demographic Impulse in the Work of Comisso, Flaiano and Dell'Oro', in *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 99-124 (p. 120).

nostro passato di cui nessuno sapeva o voleva sapere nulla.'[18] Although Dell'Oro herself claims to be trying to raise awareness of the colonial past, critical reactions to her work vary from those who consider that she fails to engage with history, presenting an idealised portrait of Africa which is steeped in nostalgic sentiment, to those who welcome her work as providing a critical perspective on the Italian colonial presence in Eritrea. Polezzi contends that in her portrayal of an unspoilt, edenic Africa, Dell'Oro falls prey to an exoticizing and nostalgic sentimentality and that the use of innocent protagonists enables her to avoid questions of individual responsibility.[19] Patrizia Palumbo includes Dell'Oro's texts amongst those autobiographies that nostalgically recall the privileges of colonial living.[20] Referring to *Asmara addio*, Charles Burdett also points to its 'abiding nostalgia for the rhythms of life in the colony'.[21] On the other hand, the renowned historian of Italian colonialism, Angelo Del Boca, praises Dell'Oro, referring to her novels as 'un tenero atto di amore per l'Eritrea e una commossa ma anche critica revisitazione degli anni eroici dell'impero'.[22] Erica Johnson again adopts a generally positive stance, claiming that Dell'Oro's works represent a challenge to naively nostalgic narratives of colonial life and serve to raise public awareness of Italy's colonial involvement in East Africa.[23] Derek Duncan also argues that, despite the often nostalgic tone of *Asmara addio*, Dell'Oro manages to weave a more critical perspective

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[18] Riccardi, Irene Claude, 'Intervista a Erminia Dell'Oro', *El-Ghibli,* December 2003 <http://www.el-ghibli.provincia.bologna.it/index.php?id=2&issue=00_02&sezione=7El-Ghibli> [accessed 30 January 2007]

[19] Polezzi, 'Non Solo Colonie', p. 315; 'Mixing Mother Tongues', p. 156.

[20] Patrizia Palumbo, 'Introduction: Italian Colonial Cultures', in *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, ed. by Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 2, 13.

[21] Charles Burdett, 'Colonial Associations and the Memory of Italian East Africa', in *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 125-42 (p. 130).

[22] Del Boca, 'L'Impero', p. 434.

[23] Erica Johnson, pp. 171-72.

into her childhood memories, showing an awareness of the more problematic aspects of the Italian colonial presence in Eritrea.[24]

Dell'Oro revisits the past both by means of her childhood memories and through adult journeys to the former colony. Numerous studies have concluded that memory is not duplicative; it is not a faithful representation of events in the past, but depends on a complex process of construction, selection, even distortion. [25] In his work on the memory of traumatic events, Lawrence Kirmayer claims that:

> Memory is anything but a photographic record of experience; it is a roadway full of potholes, badly in need of repair, worked on day and night by revisionist crews. What is registered is highly selective and thoroughly transformed by interpretation and semantic encoding at the moment of experience. What can be veridically recalled is limited and routinely reconstructed to fit models of what might have – must have happened.[26]

As a consequence of such insights into the workings of memory, Graziella Parati argues that autobiographies should be read as fiction, as they depend on the selection of certain aspects of one's past to construct the individual in the present.[27] Personal memories, however, do not exist in isolation. Studies into the psychological processes of autobiographical memory have revealed that the way in which narratives of the self are encoded depends on the cultural practices, frameworks and mythologies surrounding the individual.[28] In his discussion of childhood memories, Ian Hunter contends:

> Recall of events is, as we have seen, susceptible to considerable distortion, particularly events which occurred a long time before. There is also the possibility that the recollection may not be genuine and

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[24] Derek Duncan, 'Italian Identity', pp. 116-120.
[25] Ian M. L. Hunter, *Memory* (London: Penguin Books, 1957), pp. 21-6.
[26] Lawrence J. Kirmayer, 'Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Narrative and Dissociation', in *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. by P. Antze & M. Lambek (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 173-93 (p. 176).
[27] Graziella Parati, *Public History, Private Stories: Italian Women's Autobiographies* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis University Press: 1996), p. 4.
[28] Katherine Nelson, 'Narrative and the Self, Myth and Memory: Emergence of the Cultural Self', in *Autobiographical Memory and the Construction of a Narrative Self: Developmental and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by Robyn Fivush and Catherine A. Haden (Mahwah, New Jersey and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003), pp. 3-28 (see in particular pp. 19-24). See also Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

> that the account is based on stories of his own past which the individual has heard so often that he has come to believe erroneously that he can actually recollect the event concerned.[29]

The above quotation stresses the link between personal and collective memory: memories of our past are not just stories we tell ourselves but stories that others tell us about ourselves, which are reinforced over time. Images of the past which the individual may come to believe are his or her own are often those which have been rehearsed many times by family members. Kirmayer too insists on the role of social narratives in maintaining memory. He claims that societies have a variety of practices and rituals to promote collective remembering and that by agreeing that an event occurred, a community provides a narrative framework, or a social landscape, in which individual stories can be constructed. What is retained and what is forgotten thus depends much upon the people and the community that surrounds us.

If, as these studies suggest, memory is not just a private process but also a product of one's social and cultural environment, then Dell'Oro's memories of the colonial past should not be considered in isolation, but rather should be located within a body of writing by former Italian residents of Asmara. Her work emerges from the publications of associations for former colonial residents, a community whose vision of the past is often clouded by a deep, and perhaps only semi-conscious, nostalgia. The tendency to brush aside social and racial divisions in order to portray the colony as a utopian space or lost paradise has been noted by Charles Burdett in his study of the writings of colonial associations. Narratives of settlement also tend to present arrival in the colony as arrival in a utopian space whilst memories of colonial life tend to mourn the passing of a golden

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[29] Ian M. L. Hunter, *Memory*, pp. 269-70.

age.[30] This chapter attempts to consider Dell'Oro's work within the context of other memories of colonial life, focusing first on the journal *Mai Taclì* and the writing of Marisa Baratti. Through comparison with these texts, I discuss how Dell'Oro's work should be read as an interrogation of memory as it moves from the representation of the colony as a utopian space towards an awareness of its non-utopian characteristics. Dell'Oro's texts, as this chapter will demonstrate, progress towards an awareness of the problematic nature of colonial memory which becomes increasingly apparent when one considers the nature of these other contemporary representations of Eritrea.

Mai Taclì and Marisa Baratti

The writings of both Erminia Dell'Oro and Marisa Baratti emerge, directly or indirectly, from the culture of *Mai Taclì*. *Mai Taclì* is a bimonthly periodical written by and for former Italian residents of Eritrea which attempts to maintain links between diasporic communities by reconstructing their memories of Africa, reporting on reunions and providing information relating to former friends and neighbours. Many of the articles contained in the periodical are uncritically nostalgic and present a myopic vision of colonial life in Eritrea. Burdett describes *Mai Taclì* as a colonialist magazine for those who are bereft of a colony whilst Del Boca generously excuses the overwhelming nostalgia expressed by the contributors to *Mai Tacli* claiming that it stems from the trauma of being separated from the land of their youth.[31] The intense nostalgic tone of

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[30] Charles Burdett, 'Colonial Associations and the Memory of Italian East Africa', p. 129; Charles Burdett, 'Journeys to Italian East Africa 1936-1941', pp. 210-11. See also Angelo Del Boca, 'L'impero' p. 433.

[31] Burdett, 'Colonial Associations and the Memory of Italian East Africa', p. 127; Angelo Del Boca, *La nostra Africa: nel racconto di cinquanta italiani che l'hanno percorsa, esplorata e amata* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2003) p. 23. See also Angelo Del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienze degli Italiani: miti memorie, errori, sconfitte* (Milan: Oscar Mondadori, 2002), p. xi. According to Del Boca, the writers of the journal act in good faith as they have no memories of many of the cruelties perpetrated by Italians in Africa.

many articles is immediately apparent from their titles, for example, 'Com'era bella la "mia" Eritrea', 'Nostalgia e confessioni', and 'Nel mondo dei ricordi'.[32] The very title of the periodical, *Mai Taclì*, meaning 'pure water' in Tigray, is indicative of the belief that the Italian presence in East Africa was innocuous and represented a source of revitalization for the indigenous communities.

The myth that Italian settlers were 'brava gente' and that Italian colonialism was a more liberal, more humane and more tolerant form of colonial rule persists even to this day.[33] The contributors to *Mai Taclì* perpetuate this myth by vigorously defending Italian colonialism as being an innocent, even exemplary form of colonial domination: 'Fra tutte le storie colonialiste quella Eritrea è senza dubbio stata una delle più pulite, un esempio forse di come si sarebbe dovuto comportare un popolo europeo venuto a contatto con un popolo africano.'[34] Italian colonial settlements are also differentiated from their French and English counterparts with the latter being termed 'colonie di sfruttamento' in contrast to the supposedly more benign Italian version of 'colonie di popolamento'.[35] The attempt to distance Italian colonial rule from that of other European nations leads, at times, to what is arguably an anti-English sentiment in which the English are typically characterised as violent, insensitive and corrupt: 'L'Italia non è mai stata una nazione colonialista all'inglese ma un'Italia contadina che cercava al di là delle trombonate fasciste, di emigrare con il suo popolo meridionale per portare lavoro e

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[32] Rita Giuliano, 'Com'era bella la "mia" Eritrea', *Mai Taclì*, March/April, 2001, p. 5; Mirella Brignolo, 'Nostalgia e confessioni', *Mai Taclì*, November/December 2002, p. 3; Rosanna Gusmano, 'Nel mondo dei ricordi', *Mai Taclì*, November/December 2001, p. 5.

[33] Del Boca, 'The Myths, Suppressions, Denials and Defaults of Italian Colonialism', pp. 19, 20, 32. See also Del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienza degli Italiani*, pp. vii, 113.

[34] Di Paolo, *Mai Taclì*, May/June 2001, p. 12.

[35] Angra, *Mai Taclì*, March/April 2003, p. 1.

benessere.'[36] The contributors tend to focus on the advantages brought by the Italians and emphasise their civilizing effect on the indigenous population: 'Gli italiani da sempre ed in ogni epoca hanno lavorato per l'elevazione morale e materiale dei nativi.'[37] *Mai Taclì* attempts to keep alive memories of Italian colonial life in Eritrea, but persists in an obstinate defence of Italian colonialism and in so doing it perpetuates the myth of Italian colonialism as a benign settlement by 'brava gente' looking for their place in the sun.

The blinkered view of Eritrea presented by the periodical is perhaps most evident in its obituary section, which is aptly named 'Il Paradiso degli Asmarini'. As one columnist muses, owing to the advancing years of the colony's former residents, this section of heaven is becoming as overcrowded as an Adriatic coastal resort in mid August.[38] The term 'Asmarini', however, is used almost exclusively to refer to Italian residents of Asmara and, following the line of other sections of the periodical, it fails to recognise the presence of indigenous Eritreans. The racial divisions which characterised former colonial life are thus replicated in the Italian community's visions of a heavenly afterlife.

One of the regular features of the periodical is Marisa Baratti's column 'Era una volta il...' in which Baratti relates an event from the past, often a family outing or an episode from her childhood in Asmara. These articles have recently been published as a collection in *Era una volta il... Ricordi d'Eritrea dal 1919 al 1989.*[39] Baratti and Dell'Oro share remarkably similar backgrounds; they formed part of a second generation of children to be born and raised in Asmara and their Italian grandfathers both arrived in

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[36] Tosoni, *Mai Taclì*, January/February 2003, p. 12. See also Baratti, *Era una volta*, pp. 7, 9, 70, 88.
[37] Patané, *Mai Taclì*, September/October, 2001, p. 1.
[38] Angra, *Mai Taclì*, July/August 2002, p. 3.
[39] Marisa Baratti, *Era una volta il... Ricordi d'Eritrea dal 1919 al 1989*, (Milan: Montedit, 2003).

the colony in 1896 (*Era una volta*, p. 13). However, Baratti's representation of colonial life stands out for its uncritically nostalgic perspective on the Italian colonial presence in Africa. In contrast to the polyphony of voices to be found in Dell'Oro's writing, the colonial space in *Era una volta il...* is presented solely from the point of view of the coloniser. This colonial voice with its focus on mastery and ownership resonates throughout the text. Angelo Granara's preface to the text promises that even a reader who has not experienced the wonders of life in Eritrea 'finisce per sentirlo anche un po' suo' (*Era una volta*, p. 5). Italy's relatively small colony of Eritrea becomes, by synecdoche, 'la mia Africa' as Italy's colonial rule is transformed into an intimate personal possession and Eritrea comes to represent the entire African continent (*Era una volta*, p. 50).[40] The rhetoric is extended further to include global domination, suggesting that Eritrea was seen as just the beginnings of empire, thus betraying the imperial ambitions of the Italian colonisers. After an effusive description of the town of Mai Serao, Baratti declares: 'Mi sento la padrona di tutto, di questo profumo esaltante, del sole, del cielo, del mondo' (*Era una volta*, p. 18). The mountain peak of Bet Makà is described as: 'Un posto ineguagliabile per difendere la conquista di Asmara, un posto impareggiabile per dominare il mondo, per toccare il cielo con le mani' (*Era una volta*, p. 50). Through these hyperbolic descriptions, Baratti clearly asserts her territorial claims over the landscape. Her sense of belonging to a space outside the Italian peninsula is never questioned and the Italian presence in Africa is never problematised. Baratti locates herself firmly within the Italian colonial community of Eritrea which provides her with a place in the world and a place in history.

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[40] Del Boca (*La nostra Africa*, p. 5) uses the term 'La nostra Africa' as a political and historical term to denote the part of Africa that was under Italian sovereignty. This is quite different from the way Baratti uses the term as the above examples demonstrate.

Baratti's feelings of being located in Eritrea rely heavily on images of the natural world as harmonious and peaceful. Such images serve to mask the violence implicit in the forceful occupation of a foreign land and political domination of its people. In her collection of articles Baratti recreates images of Eritrea as an earthly paradise (*Era una volta*, pp. 36, 52, 83). Her portrayal of Africa is replete with images of cloudless blue skies, the scent of eucalyptus trees and the gentle breeze of the high plains (*Era una volta*, pp. 18, 50, 60, 76). In contrast to Dell'Oro's representation of Africa discussed below, these descriptions convey a sanitised and idyllic vision of the colonial space. The natural world is represented as gentle and welcoming with no mention of scorching heat or violent storms. Instead, a personified nature caresses and embraces the child, effectively a metaphor for how Eritrea is perceived to be welcoming the Italian settlers:

> Non è silenzio, sono le fronde degli eucaliptus che bisbigliano a questo venticello tiepido che mi passa sulla faccia, mi muove piano i capelli *come una carezza dolcissima.* (*Era una volta*, p. 10)[41]

> [L]e montagne ci chiudono in *un abbraccio ravvicinato*, se, poco più sotto, la nebbia ha formato un letto candido e compatto, irreale, e pare soffice come la panna. (*Era una volta*, p. 21)

> Muto anche *il mare che accarezza* con infinita delicatezza i nostri passi. (*Era una volta*, p. 83)

> C'è tanto vento tiepido che scompiglia capelli e indumenti ma è gentile, garbato e *pare un abbraccio.* (*Era una volta*, p. 147)

The undeniable force of nature is softened through use of diminutives and suffixes, so that no extremes are allowed to disfigure this edenic portrait.

Like most of the contributors to *Mai Taclì*, Baratti was born in Eritrea when it was an Italian colony and left when she was an adult. For Baratti and her community of ex-colonials the Italian colonial period is inextricably linked to memories of early childhood. Throughout her writing, Baratti reveals a deep nostalgia for her childhood days in Africa, sentiments which are shared by many of her community. These bygone

[41] Emphasis my own.

days are described in the preface as: 'Gli anni più belli di una gioventù trascorsa in un'Africa che non esiste più' (*Era una volta*, p. 5). Again, Eritrea is replaced by the continent of Africa, but here the Africa that no longer exists is linked to the period of childhood. The intense nostalgia that pervades the articles stems therefore from a dual sense of loss, the loss of 'Africa' and the loss of youth. The loss of Italy's colonial possessions represents the loss of the place where many ex-colonials were born, to which they felt they belonged and the place which they called 'home'. Furthermore, those 'African' days are now distant in time and space and thus their demise is also expressed as regret for the passing of time and loss of youth. Even the climatic conditions of Eritrea are linked to the period of youth as in one of Baratti's poems the seemingly never-ending springtime is equated with a period of youthful happiness: 'l'eterna primavera ferma il tempo / e giovane ti senti.'[42] The emphasis on a happy, carefree existence is perhaps not surprising as Ian Hunter's work on memory indicates that the majority of memories retained from childhood tend to be connected to pleasant events and positive emotions.[43]

This sense of nostalgia is further conveyed through the structure of the text. As Nicola King argues, 'nostalgia expresses itself not only as a mode of remembering the past as lost, but also as a regret for the passing of a "true", "spontaneous" or "organic" form of memory'.[44] Notwithstanding the title of the text, Baratti's memories are mostly narrated in the present tense as if entries in a diary. However, unlike diary entries, they are not ordered chronologically, instead they appear in the order they were first

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[42] Marisa Baratti, *Mai Tacli*, November/December 2002, p. 3.
[43] Ian M. L. Hunter, *Memory*, p. 272.
[44] Nicola King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 5.

published in *Mai Taclì.* The random sequencing recreates the sense of memories as spontaneous and fragmented. There is a form of blindness in these memoirs and the fragmented narrative structure works to prevent any development of consciousness within the text. The preface describes each episode as a display of watercolour paintings in a gallery (*Era una volta*, p. 5), illustrating that the text is not a narrative which progresses towards a resolution or deeper understanding of the world, but is simply a series of similar but separate representations. The use of present tense and a child's narrative voice allows the writer to evade any retrospective analysis that one might expect from an adult narrator looking back on Italy's occupation and extension of power over a foreign territory.

This lack of retrospection is best demonstrated in Baratti's attitudes towards Italy's Fascist past and its links with colonial expansion. In her article 'Era una volta il ... 1937: 21 aprile, Amba Galliano', Baratti describes a Fascist military procession in which her sisters were taking part in a youth parade. The narrative voice conveys a sense of pride as it recreates the festive atmosphere along with music, flags and military uniforms. The child's enthusiasm for the spectacle extends even to the cries of 'Duce' as the procession passes before them: 'È proprio una bella giornata di festa: sono felice perché tutti sorridono, o perché il cielo è blu, perché anche i falchi oggi ballano a bassa quota dove arrivano le note di questi inni.'[45] Once again, the representation of the natural world is such that it appears to be allied to the Italian cause as even the birds are portrayed as dancing to the Fascist hymns. An equally problematic approach to Fascism can be seen when she laments the changing name of the central avenue of Asmara, viale Mussolini:

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[45] Marisa Baratti, *Mai Taclì*, July/August 2003, p. 3.

> Per noi è sempre viale Mussolini, anche se è stato Elisabetta e Italia, o sarà Hailè Selassiè o della Liberazione. Quando ci si mette in testa una cosa... peggio un luogo: come cambiasse il nome, improvvisamente del tuo migliore amico. E questo viale, con le sue palme che si allungano ogni giorno, che allargano le braccia quasi volessero accarezzarci quando lentamente o frettolosamente ci passiamo sotto [...] beh, è come il migliore amico. Conosce i nostri passi, di ognuno di noi potrebbe dire il nome. (*Era una volta*, p. 141)

Memories of this palm lined street are central to Baratti's memories of childhood and feelings of belonging to this place are again expressed through her representation of nature as the palm branches reach down to caress the passers-by. However, there seems to be little awareness of the bizarre effect of juxtaposing the name Mussolini with the expression 'best friend'. Is it possible to personify the street named Mussolini without evoking the actual historical figure? Is the expressed desire to return to the days when the street was named viale Mussolini also a desire to return to Italy's Fascist past? There is no reflection on the reasons for the change of name and no attempt to place it in its historical context. Despite the strong implications in this passage, Baratti offers little in the way of reflection. Her untroubled notions of the past persist into the present.

Era una volta il... presents Eritrea from the point of view of a community of ex-colonials whose past lives are unchanged by present reflection. As a result it adopts an entirely uncritical stance towards the Italian colonial presence in East Africa, a position which is facilitated by the choice of narrative voice and structure. Baratti's anachronistic depictions of life in Eritrea endlessly repeat images of a fairy-tale atmosphere whilst glossing over the more unpleasant aspects of colonial occupation which would undoubtedly disrupt her idyllic vision of 'questa nostra tranquilla, meravigliosa città' (*Era una volta*, p. 10). Baratti's writing is by no means atypical as there are plenty more examples from the literature associated with *Mai Taclì*.

ASMARA ADDIO

Erminia Dell'Oro was also raised in Asmara when the city formed part of the Italian colony of Eritrea and feels a deep connection to the land of her birth, referring to herself as 'African'.[46] It is not surprising therefore that her writing echoes the vision of the past that typifies the writing of Baratti and the wider community of the former residents of Asmara. In her portrayal of colonial life with its conservative nature, fixed gender roles and strict racial hierarchy, Dell'Oro can be seen to reproduce many of the images of Eritrea that emerge from Baratti's writing. It is my contention, however, that Dell'Oro weaves her positive memories of childhood into a more critical narrative framework in an attempt to move beyond these anachronistic representations of the colonial past. *Asmara addio* and *La Gola del Diavolo* both feature a narrative consciousness that moves away from representations of an idyllic childhood towards an awareness of the problematic status of the colony which is recreated through a particular delineation of space. At the same time, her narratives raise questions concerning the veracity of memory, pointing to its constructed and ultimately unreliable nature.

Asmara addio reads as both an affirmation of the edenic nature of Asmara but it also provides a range of criticisms of that ideal. After a brief summary of the text, the following section discusses how, through a careful negotiation of narrative voice and perspective, Dell'Oro allows for the recognition of her own positive memories of childhood alongside an adult awareness of history and how a largely positive appraisal of her family members is combined with recognition of community responsibility for the brutalities of colonial rule. It considers the arrival scenes in the text, showing how entry

[46] Interview with Irene Claudia Riccardi, *El-Ghibli*. Notably, though, Dell'Oro does not refer to herself as 'Eritrean'.

into the Promised Land is tinged with a sense that paradise is not quite what it seems. Textual representations of space likewise move from a construction of utopia to an awareness of the colony's problematic status.

Divided into three sections, the semi-autobiographical novel weaves the personal history of the protagonist, Milena Conti, and her family into major events of Italian, European and Eritrean history. The first section deals with the Italian colonial period from the arrival of early settlers in the late nineteenth century, the rise of Fascism under Mussolini and the phase of imperial expansion, through to the arrival of British forces in Asmara and the loss of Italy's African empire in 1941. It traces the life of the Conti family including the arrival of Milena's paternal grandfather, Filippo Conti, the marriage of his son Mario to Sara Mayer, Milena's birth and her early childhood experiences. The second section covers the period of British occupation and the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1952. It culminates with Milena as a young woman, leaving Eritrea for Italy to pursue a journalistic career. The final section relates Milena's visit to Eritrea in the 1970s and deals with the annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia under Haile Selassie, the Eritrean struggle for independence, showing the effects of the continued guerrilla war on the indigenous population as well as the remaining Italian population.

A common feature of travel writing is the unified subjectivity of author, narrator and protagonist. Loredana Polezzi, however, points to the multiple identities and voices evident in the writings of Italian travellers to Africa during and after the colonial period.[47] In *Asmara addio*, although the preface identifies the text as autobiographical, the main protagonist is Milena Conti. Childhood memories are focalised through the

[47] Loredana Polezzi, 'Aristocrats, Geographers, Reporters: Travelling through "Italian Africa" in the 1930s', in *Cultural Encounters: European Travel Writing in the 1930s*, ed. by Charles Burdett and Derek Duncan (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 187-204 (p. 188).

consciousness of this young girl whose life closely reflects that of the author and whose name is almost an anagram of the author's. The choice to narrate her autobiography largely through the voice and gaze of Milena is perhaps an attempt on the part of the writer to create distance between her adult-self in Italy and the childhood events that she represents.

Milena's rather naïve and limited perspective on growing up in colonial Africa is, however, interspersed by the voice of the omniscient adult narrator who relates political and historical events which occur outside the child's consciousness. Moreover, at various points the narrative is focalised through one of the characters, including indigenous Eritreans, allowing various perspectives and more critical viewpoints to surface. The contradictory positions, clash of voices and narrative perspectives in the text reflect the writer's subject position as an Italian woman, born in Africa, whose life has been divided between two countries and continents, a position that Laura Harris refers to as one of national hybridity.[48] Indeed, it is the careful negotiation of different narrative perspectives that contributes to the ambiguity of the text and perhaps accounts for its varied reception, as critics disagree as to how successful the interweaving of perspectives is in undermining the dominant voice of the child. According to Polezzi, Dell'Oro's use of a child narrator and protagonist serves to perpetuate a myth of

[48] Laura Harris, '*L'abbandono*: Who's Meticcio/Whose Meticcio in the Eritrea-Italy Diaspora?', in *ItaliAfrica: Bridging Continents and Cultures*, ed. by Sante Matteo (Stony Brook, NY: Forum Italicum, 2001), pp. 192-204 (p. 197). Whilst Laura Harris's description of national hybridity accounts for the conflicting voices in Dell'Oro's writing, her definition of Dell'Oro as a national meticcio is more problematic. By likening Dell'Oro's position as an Italian with a sense of dual national identity with the dual racial identity of the 'meticci', or children of mixed race, she erases the considerable differences in power and status between these two groups of people. Italian residents of Eritrea generally enjoyed a privileged position in colonial society and were free to move between the two countries. The 'meticci', on the other hand, were marginalised by both societies, often being abandoned by their Italian parent and rejected by the indigenous community.

innocence surrounding the Italian presence in Eritrea.[49] Derek Duncan, in contrast, argues that the novel's structure and its range of voices create an awareness of the limitations of the child's world view and invite the reader to distance him/herself from the innocent position of the child.[50]

Dell'Oro's experiences of life in the Italian colony of Eritrea are encoded in different genres. *Asmara addio* blends the autobiographical experiences with those of the fictional protagonist whilst factual information presented by the historian-narrator combines with the fantasy of a child's imagination, adding to the fairy-tale atmosphere of the text. Johnson highlights the generic complexity of *Asmara addio* and notes that, despite the potentially realist endeavour of autobiography, Dell'Oro often approaches reality through fantasy.[51] The preface refers to the text as a 'testimonianza' and praises Dell'Oro's ability to narrate great and small events 'con un commovente rispetto per le verità umane, ma anche con una sorprendente libertà di trasformare la realtà in favola' (*Asmara*, p. 5). As with the blurring of narrative perspectives, there is also a blurring of fantasy and reality which is typical of memories of early childhood. Likewise, the boundaries between the child protagonist's fantasy world and actual lived events are so obscured that, at times, even the protagonist cannot distinguish fact from fiction. For example, on the day of her school trip to Hebo, Milena slips away with her unnamed lover to spend the day sailing around the Dahlac islands of the Red Sea. The next morning, Milena's memories are hazy and she is unsure whether this blissful day actually took place or whether it had all been a dream: 'Il ricordo aveva contorni irreali, sfumature di mondi inventati. [...] Forse mi ero addormentata sul Pullman che andava a

[49] Loredana Polezzi, 'Non Solo Colonie', p. 313.
[50] Derek Duncan, 'Italian Identity', p. 121.
[51] Erica Johnson, p. 178.

Hebo' (*Asmara*, p. 188). As an adult, she has no recollection of ever visiting Hebo and is unable to explain how an image of the place is so vividly imprinted on her mind:

> Avrebbe potuto essere solo quel giorno a lasciarmi il ricordo del villaggio sperduto nel sole. O era l'immaginazione, le cose che mi avevano detto, perché in qualche modo, Hebo, avrei dovuto inventarlo. (*Asmara*, p. 189)

The above passage casts doubt on Milena's memories but also makes the reader conscious that historical constructions are often unreliable as they are based on the imperfect memory of the writer, influenced by the dominant discourses of the surrounding community and subject to invention and elaboration. The blurring of autobiography with fiction, imagination with lived experience, fact with fantasy, and the slippage from child narrator to omniscient narrator, make it difficult to establish Dell'Oro's own position.

Nicola Labanca has identified what he refers to as a third phase in the Italian memory of colonialism which, he claims, began in the early 1980s. This phase is characterised by the interweaving of contradictory positions including the tendency to portray Italians as good colonists balanced with the desire to take onboard the responsibilities of Italy's colonial past.[52] This intertwining of such contradictory positions is best demonstrated in the portrayal of the protagonist's family in which Dell'Oro relies on constructions of a harmonious society populated by 'brava gente' but, at the same time, she points to the more violent episodes of colonial history. The father figure in the text, Mario Conti acts as the quintessential colonial man, a mythical figure described by Del Boca: 'Se è soldato, generalmente è rispettoso e cavalleresco. Se è

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[52] Nicola Labanca, 'History and Memory of Italian Colonialism Today', in *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 29–46 (see p. 36).

civile, è tollerante e addirittura fraternizza con le popolazioni indigene.'[53] Mario is portrayed as a respectable member of the community as well as a fair and generous employer who 'aveva sempre trattato con gentilezza gli eritrei che servivano in casa' (*Asmara*, p. 130). Mario also asserts his political position as an anti-Fascist; he marries an Italian Jew and helps her family escape Italy and the anti-Semitic race laws introduced in 1938 (*Asmara*, p. 40).[54] His status and authority are balanced with qualities such as generosity, compassion and moral virtue. He is also shown in the role of philanthropist, giving money to the poor as they queue outside his home on Saturday afternoons (*Asmara*, p. 130). He provides furniture for his servant, Eliseo, when he moves to the city (*Asmara*, p. 157). Later, during a conflict between Eritrean guerrilla fighters and Ethiopian forces and despite his own injuries, Mario unselfishly distributes water to his former employees and hides Eliseo and his sons in his own home:

> Nelle ore in cui non c'era il coprifuoco Mario girava da una parte all'altra della città trasportando nella sua auto barili di acqua e i pochi generi alimentari che riusciva a raccogliere. Lo si vedeva in periferia, con la gamba zoppicante, entrare nelle case dei suoi ex operai per accertarsi che fossero vivi e portar loro l'acqua. (*Asmara*, pp. 227-28)

Mario is thus portrayed as a family man who can be strong when required but at the same time is capable of acts of generosity and kindness towards the colonised subjects. He is presented as an authoritative figure, worthy of respect, who conquers, not by brute force, but by merit.

Filippo Conti, the grandfather, is described in similar terms: 'non ha mai combattuto in nessuna campagna d'Africa ed ha avuto con gli eritrei degli ottimi rapporti' (*Asmara*, p. 30). Both the child and adult narrators emphasise the innocence of the protagonist's

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[53] Angelo Del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienza degli Italiani*, p. 113.

[54] Mario Conti does acknowledge that many other colonial residents including his own sisters were sympathetic towards Mussolini. However, this is more a statement of their political naivety than of their adherence to Fascist ideology: 'Devo confessare che anche le mie sorelle hanno una grande ammirazione per Mussolini, ma noi in Africa sappiamo ben poco (*Asmara*, p. 40).

family, distinguishing the original settlers from those who arrived during the Fascist period. It is implied that the early pioneers were upstanding members of the community, 'alberi che in quella terra avevano messo profonde radici' (*Asmara*, p. 90). These men are cast as 'good colonists' and portrayed as strong, stable and permanent fixtures of the community. Having formed a strong attachment to the foreign land, they have no desire to be uprooted. The text contains repeated references to the many sacrifices made by these early settlers and the benefits that their presence brought to the Eritrean country and people: 'Sentivo spesso parlare dei vecchi coloniali, di episodi della loro vita, dei sacrifici fatti in quella lontana seconda patria per renderla confortevole, perché nulla mancasse alle future generazioni' (*Asmara*, p. 21).

Conversely, those who arrived in the colony during the period of expansion under Mussolini supposedly comprised the dregs of Italian society whose primary motive was to exploit the colony for their own advantage:

> In quegli anni arrivarono in Abissinia uomini di ogni condizione: disoccupati di cui l'Italia si liberava volentieri, avventurieri in cerca di fortuna, manovali, professionisti, disgraziati che in patria tiravano a campare, tutti sospinti dalle parole del duce che aveva promesso benessere nelle lontane terre d'Africa. (*Asmara*, p.34)

> Migliaia di uomini giungono continuamente a Massaua, e molti di loro sono dei disgraziati che fuggono volentieri dalla patria. (*Asmara*, p.40)

The opinions expressed above, by both the child narrator and the historian, demonstrate how the views of the wider community of ex-colonial residents impinge upon Dell'Oro's narrative and the worldview of her characters. For instance, when the period of Italian imperial expansion under Fascism is referred to 'cinque anni di lavoro e di sacrifici' (p. 76), the subjective view of the colonial community can be seen to infiltrate the impersonal voice of the historian. As the narrative slips from one voice to another it

is not always immediately clear whose view is being represented. Is the voice that of an innocent child, the author as an adult, a character in the text or the historian?

On the other hand, the myth of Italian colonialism as being an innocent and humane form of settlement is dislodged by the voice of the omniscient historian/narrator who does not shy away from informing the reader of the more sinister side of the Italian presence in Eritrea, including Italy's use of mustard gas against Ethiopian soldiers at Lake Ashangi in 1936 (*Asmara*, pp. 33, 149).[55] The episode is narrated through the recurring dreams of Elias, an Eritrean who worked for the Conti family and whose father had been amongst those killed at the lake. The narrator represents the full horrors of thirsty, battle-weary soldiers as they drank from the poisoned water: 'Dolori atroci gli contorsero lo stomaco e altri come lui che stavano bevendo urlarono al cielo, al Dio che era altrove' (*Asmara*, p. 149). Elias is told never to forget the murder of his father and is no longer able to look a white man in the eye. Through the nightmares and resentment of Elias, the narrator not only demonstrates the personal suffering of an individual family but also introduces the impact of the wars of Fascism on the relationship between Eritreans and the colonial community.[56]

As previously discussed, various scholars have noted that many narratives of colonial settlement tend to portray arrival in the colonies as the arrival in a utopian space or terrestrial paradise. Mary Louise Pratt has suggested that arrival scenes play an important role in travel writing as they frame relations of contact between the traveller

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[55] For information on the use of chemical gas by Italian forces in Ethiopia see Alberto Sbacchi, 'Poison Gas and Atrocities in the Italo-Ethiopian War (1935-1936)', in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 47-56. See also Angelo Del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienza degli Italiani*, pp. 62-65.
[56] Erica Johnson, p. 181.

and the host community and set the terms of its representation.[57] The way in which the arrival of Milena and her family in Asmara is depicted illustrates the way the colonial space was viewed in the minds of the settlers. Milena's arrival, or rather birth, in Asmara is presented as predestined. In the fable-like opening of the text, Milena, in her pre-human existence, has a conversation with God in which she pleads to be born on the coral island of Modok in the Red Sea. However, as Modok was the island of birds, God arranged for her to be born as near as possible to her desired place, and so she came to be born on the high plains of Eritrea (*Asmara*, p. 11). In this mythical account of creation, Milena's birth into a family of Italian origin living in Eritrea is presented as having divine approval. The child narrator speaks from an innocent perspective evoking Africa as a magical place, a fairy-tale world full of fantastical figures. She depicts the high plains of Eritrea as 'una fiaba sospesa nell'aria Africana, con il monte Bizen ai cui piedi si aprivano precipizi vestiti di verde, il cielo blu punteggiato dal volo dei falchi' (*Asmara*, p. 11). Milena thus arrives in a multicoloured paradise, an ahistorical and primordial Africa. Yet, as the narrative goes on to show, this image of paradise can only be sustained by ignoring certain realities. Later, Milena's birth is juxtaposed with that of a cousin, which occurs on the same day, but in dark room in a Nazi concentration camp (*Asmara,* pp. 88, 89).[58] The newborn baby is seized by a guard and thrown into a mass grave. This violent episode forces a realisation that the colony does not exist outside of history but, rather, life in the colony is very much connected to political events in the wider world.

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[57] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 78.
[58] Brigitte Le Gouez, 'L'Africa di Erminia Dell'Oro', pp. 314, 322.

The arrival of Milena's paternal grandfather in Asmara is narrated as a chance event. Filippo Conti is portrayed in the first chapter as a naïve young man, full of hope and ambition but bored with the monotony of factory life in his village in Northern Italy. In an allusion to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Filippo's fascination for the 'dark continent' with its promises of natural beauty and mineral wealth prompts him to leave Italy for the Congo (*Asmara*, p. 13). Filippo, however, never reaches his intended destination as the ship on which he was travelling was forced to dock in Massaua following an outbreak of yellow fever. Tired, hot and confused, Filippo meets the Levi family and follows them to the high plains of Eritrea and the city of Asmara where he was to spend the next twenty-five years of his life. The emphasis on his youth and ingenuity reinforces the stereotype of the colonist as a male adventurer, led by fate and fortune. In a scene reminiscent of Baratti's 'perenne primavera', Asmara becomes 'un paese abitato da un'eterna primavera in cui sarebbe sorta una piccola città vicino al cielo' and 'un paese di sogno' (*Era una volta*, p. 51; *Asmara*, pp. 14, 16). Filippo's journey from Massaua to Asmara is portrayed as an ascent towards the heavens, reinforcing the notion of utopian space (*Asmara*, p. 15). In a further echo of Baratti's portrait, the air of the high plain is described as refreshing and the colonial city itself seems to be enveloped in a blanket of warm clouds, suggesting an insular and welcoming environment. Filippo's first view of Asmara is described thus:

> Guardò la terra rossa, il cielo blu che gli parve una delle cose più belle che avesse mai visto e, mentre lo ammirava, vide una nube vagabonda e gli sembrò di scorgere, seduto sulla nube, un angelo musicante che posando il suo violino gli fece un cenno di saluto. (*Asmara*, p. 16)

In Filippo's metaphorical ascent towards the heavens he reaches a state of the sublime and, just like the birth of Milena, supernatural elements appear to bestow divine approval on his presence in the city.

However, when Filippo Conti arrives in Eritrea, a more sinister cloud is hanging over the colony. The scene of his arrival is broken by the narrative voice of the historian who recalls the tragic events of Adwa in 1896, just a year before Filippo's arrival when Italy suffered the worst defeat by a European nation in modern colonial history.[59]

> Era stata una tragedia che aveva pesato sul cuore dell'Italia e che aveva opportunamente distolto, come ben sapevano i ministri di allora, l'opinione pubblica da scandali nazionali in cui erano coinvolte le banche più prestigiose. (*Asmara*, pp. 14, 15)

A similarly critical narrative voice comments on how memories of this defeat were used forty years later to bolster support for Fascist aggression against Ethiopia, calling into question the right of a nation to occupy the land of another people against their will: 'Un giorno il lontano popolo abissino, che non aveva chiesto a nessuno di essere colonizzato, avrebbe dovuto pagare a caro prezzo quel massacro' (*Asmara*, p. 15). Rather than being the chance arrival of innocent settlers in an empty Garden of Eden, the narrative forces a consciousness of the wider implications of colonial rule and questions the ethics of the colonial mission.

The religious imagery resumes when the Mayer family, Lia, Erich and their daughter Sara, Milena's mother, first arrive in Eritrea. As they sail through the Suez Canal, Lia Mayer imagines the figure of Moses and the long journey taken by Jewish people in search of the Promised Land: 'E Lia, guardando la terra degli avi, vide Mosè sul monte dettare le leggi di Dio, e il popolo che da quei luoghi se n'era andato esule per il mondo, in attesa della terra promessa' (*Asmara*, p. 58). The Mayer family had left Italy to escape the Race Laws in Italy and the growing anti-Semitic mood in Europe and there is almost a comparison being made between the plight of the family and the exodus of the biblical Jews (*Asmara*, p 53). For Lia, Eritrea is a safe haven, her own Promised Land. Derek

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[59] Angelo Del Boca, *La nostra Africa*, p. 20.

Duncan suggests that 'the very idea of a Jewish Italian colonial presence in the late 1930s necessarily confounds any notion of the singularity of colonial identity and the motivations for settlement'.[60] The suffering of Jews in Europe, which lingers in the margins of text, provides yet another perspective on colonial settlement and acts as a contrast to the relatively secure and privileged life the family experience in the colonial city:

> Il passato era già lontano e il futuro si stendeva ai suoi piedi come un variopinto tappeto tessuto dalle regine delle mille e una notte. Erich, appoggiato alla balaustra, guardava lontano. E vedeva, sotto un cielo di neri e fiamme, avanzare un lungo corteo di ombre. (*Asmara*, pp. 55, 56)

Even before the Mayer family reach Asmara, dreams of the Promised Land are disrupted by the presence of poverty and disease. Lia is immersed in admiration of the landscape when an encounter with a leper on the mountain road jolts her back to reality. The episode forces the family to acknowledge that this unknown land was not some earthly utopia, and that there could be no ultimate refuge from misery and suffering:

> Pensò alla loro fuga dall'Italia, dalla malvagità, dall'ingiustizia, dalle persecuzioni. Ma dovunque fossero andati lo specchio immenso del male, sospeso fra il cielo e la terra, avrebbe riflesso sul volto di un lebbroso, nella pancia gonfia di un bambino, come quello che ora agitava le piccole mani in segno di saluto. (*Asmara*, p. 61)

A short while later, the family pass 'la Gola del Diavolo', a deep ravine where many travellers had met an untimely death. According to local legend, the bottom of the ravine was the site of Hell and voices could be heard calling from deep in the abyss. The Gola del Diavolo and the small gravestones that cling to the edge of the precipice remind the settlers of the precarious nature of human existence and puncture their vision of paradise. The narrator later reminds the reader that 'quel Paradiso di suoni e colori nascondeva insidie infernali' (*Asmara*, p. 77). In all three arrival scenes, therefore, the image of paradise is tarnished by a spectrum of violence, poverty and disease.

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[60] Derek Duncan, 'Italian Identity', p. 118.

Dell'Oro's portrayal of life in Asmara is balanced with an awareness that whilst for some the colony may have represented paradise, for others life was far from ideal. *Asmara addio* suggests that the white population led a privileged lifestyle with considerable leisure time at their disposal that could be spent in activities such as tennis, bridge parties and picnics (*Asmara*, p. 90). However, this lifestyle was made possible, in part, by the custom of employing indigenous men and women as domestic servants. Dell'Oro comments that even in the early days of colonialism it was common practice for African women to undertake the tasks that Italians were reluctant to do: 'Si cominciava a utilizzare ragazzine e donne per i lavori più faticosi' (*Asmara*, p. 22). Turù, the washer-woman, worked three days a week for the Conti family, each day rising at dawn and returning at dusk, travelling ten kilometres each way. Her husband had been seriously injured following an accident on a building project, leaving her to provide for her extended family (*Asmara*, pp. 22-27).

The text also recognises the racial and social segregation upon which the colony was built. Whilst the white community live in comfortable and spacious villas, the indigenous people are assigned to the periphery of the city:

> Era l'Asmara dei bianchi, e sul Corso Mussolini, divenuto poi Corso Italia, allora non passavano gli eritrei. Se ne stavano, quelli urbani, ad Abbasciaul, alla periferia di Asmara, a sopravvivere nella loro secolare miseria. (*Asmara*, p. 22)

This description reflects the racial laws introduced by the Fascist government in 1938 which forced indigenous people to live in separate areas, forbade interracial marriage and excluded them from Italian bars, hotels and cinemas in a system of segregation which Angelo Del Boca regards as a forerunner of the Apartheid regime in South

Africa.[61] The white population are shown to participate in a privileged way of life from which indigenous Africans were excluded in spatial and social terms.

Once within the colony, Milena's mother, Sara Mayer devotes considerable time to cultivating the garden of their colonial villa: 'La mamma curava il giardino con passione [...] ed era molto gelosa delle sue variopinte creazioni' (*Asmara*, p. 99). Mary Louise Pratt has commented on the frequency of descriptions of home interiors in the writing of British women who travelled to the colonies and suggests that, for these women, the home functions as a room-sized empire.[62] In *Asmara addio*, it is the space of the garden which becomes a model of the colonial enterprise with women carving out and cultivating their own small territory in the African landscape. However, this idyllic 'Garden of Eden' is destroyed when a swarm of locusts devours everything in its path. This episode serves to highlight the incongruous nature of the European garden with its flowerbeds and lawns cut into the African landscape. Milena's dismay at that fact that 'la mamma non troverà più i suoi fiori' is contrasted with the plight of the Eritrean people whose harvest has been destroyed and who face the prospect of famine (*Asmara*, p. 102). By the end of the text, the garden has withered along with the colonial dream. In a letter to Milena, Sara writes: 'I miei poveri fiori hanno sete, mi sembra che occhieggino tristi mostrando colori appassiti' (*Asmara*, p. 232).

When Milena reaches adulthood, she makes the decision to leave Eritrea as she feels it has no future to offer her. The surrounding mountains, which formerly had represented a protection from the outside world, are now seen as impeding her progress (*Asmara*, p. 203). In contrast to the scenes that greeted her grandfather almost sixty years before,

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[61] Angelo Del Boca, 'L'Impero', p. 429.
[62] Mary Louise Pratt, p. 160.

nature is now depicted as threatening rather than welcoming. The mist and clouds now combine to create a suffocating atmosphere:

> Sentivo nel petto un senso di soffocamento, era come se mi stessi smarrendo in una vita senza più finestre sul mondo. Guardava le nubi passare veloci trasformandosi in draghi e in uccelli, le spiavo con ansia, gli angeli musicanti se n'erano andati. (*Asmara*, p. 203)

The notion of a utopian world is further disrupted in the final section of the novel when Milena returns to Eritrea as an adult. Asmara has become 'un sogno stracciato', 'il regno dell'ombra e della desolazione' (*Asmara*, p. 240). Significantly, the only place in Asmara that Milena describes is the cemetery where she visits the graves of her deceased relatives. She also stops at the grave of Lisetta, a girl she had known as a child. Lisetta was a 'meticcia', a child of mixed race, who had been abandoned by her Italian father, rejected by the indigenous community and forced into prostitution. On her return to Eritrea, Milena hears that Lisetta has committed suicide, leaving behind two young children (*Asmara*, p. 238). Through the figure of Lisetta, Dell'Oro introduces a further consequence of colonial rule. The plight of children of mixed race, whose Italian fathers had returned to Italy, is a theme that she returns to and explores in greater detail in her later novel *L'abbandono*.[63]

The coastal town of Massaua is similarly transformed from a beautiful colonial city to a menacing place where crows and vultures circle overhead (*Asmara*, p. 241). Milena recognises, however, that the transformation has as much do with her own way of seeing as it does with any material change in the city. As an adult, she views the city from a different perspective rather than from the narrow world vision of the white colonial community. She thus realises that the misery, which now stares her in the face, had always been present:

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[63] See Laura Harris, '*L'abbandono*: Who's Meticcio/Whose Meticcio', pp. 192-204; see also Derek Duncan, 'Italian Identity', pp. 118-20.

> Eravamo troppo giovani e felici per vedere le sue miserie; [...] non badavamo al bambino affamato che ci guardava come fossimo di un altro pianeta, o alla madre che spremava i suoi seni avvizziti per un neonato già vicino alla morte. Ma allora la miseria camminava in punta di piedi, o se ne stava nascosta dentro case di periferia che noi ignoravamo. (*Asmara*, p. 245)

The Italian community had averted their gaze from the less pleasant aspects of life. It has been easier to ignore the underside of colonial life, rather than acknowledging that their dreams were flawed.

In the closing paragraphs, the narrative turns full circle as Milena finally reaches the mythical island of Modok only to find that it has been destroyed. It has become a lifeless place, the coral has died, the birds have left and even the empty shells on the sand have lost their former lustre. The death of the coral island appears to be linked in the text with the loss of memory. Milena's memories have become faded and discoloured along with the discarded shells on the beach. Just like the dead coral, only the bare bones remain:

> Tentai di afferrare gli attimi di quel tempo lontano in cui ero io, come ora, a vivere le stesse emozioni, ma il ricordo che non ero riuscita a comporre si era già inabissato nelle immense voragini di memorie perdute. (*Asmara*, p. 255)

The loss Milena feels on returning to her former home is therefore the loss of her innocent childhood memories. The desolation that confronts her on return to Eritrea has tainted her vision of the past, prompting the realisation that her childhood memories offered a distorted lens through which to view the colony.

Although Dell'Oro's narrative relies to a certain extent on ideological constructions of utopian space that typify other nostalgic representations of colonial Africa, the more one probes the text the more one sees that the vision of Eritrea as a Promised Land is dislodged and complex and critical statements are being made about the Italian presence in East Africa. The development of narrative consciousness becomes most notable in the final chapter's images of death and decay. Despite the insistence on the Conti family's innocent position, there is an attempt to undermine the myth of the Italian settlers as

'good colonists' through the interjections of the historian-narrator. In the arrival scenes, the vision of Eritrea as a terrestrial paradise is exposed as flawed and shown to exist only as a dream in the minds of the new settlers. However, in its use of multiple voices and narrative perspectives, *Asmara addio* remains an ambiguous text in which Dell'Oro attempts to reconcile positive memories of growing up in Eritrea with an adult knowledge of colonial history. The novel ends, as it begins, with Milena looking at the fantasy island of Modok. As she holds a shell to her ear and tries to recapture her lost memories, birds start to flock back to the island. The novel thus ends on a positive image of renewal. The protagonist, although now an adult, still demonstrates a desire to retreat into the recesses of her memory and imagination, suggesting a longing to see the world once more through the simple and unproblematic gaze of an innocent child.

La Gola del Diavolo

It becomes more apparent in Dell'Oro's later text, *La Gola del Diavolo*, that the image of the colony as an edenic space is being thoroughly deconstructed. The text shares many similarities with *Asmara addio* as it relates the history of the Italian presence in Africa from the perspective of a young female child growing up in colonial Eritrea. *La Gola del Diavolo* involves a reworking of many of the stories in *Asmara addio* and many of the characters and places are easily identified with their earlier counterparts.[64] Thus, it can be seen as a commentary on the earlier text. The protagonist, Lù, like Milena, lives with her family in Bosco Fiorito (the Italian translation of Asmara) and is part of a second generation of children to be born in the colony. A naturally inquisitive and adventurous child, Lù defies the warnings of the adults in order to explore the

[64] For example, Bosco Fiorito as Asmara, Lù as Milena, Isabella as Roberta, Bri as Mafrasc, Cettina as Lisetta.

countryside around her hometown. She is especially intrigued by tales of la Gola del Diavolo, a deep ravine in the landscape just outside the town which has claimed many lives and is rumoured to be the site of lost souls and forgotten stories. The text opens with Lù waking from a nightmare in which she is falling into the abyss of la Gola del Diavolo:

> Svegliandosi, Lù si rannicchiava sotto le coperte per difendersi dalle insidie del buio, per allontanare il sogno, ma le immagini le aveva ormai dentro e non riusciva a ricacciarle negli angoli da cui erano emerse. (*Gola*, p. 7)

These opening images of darkness provide a sharp contrast to Milena's dream of the idyllic coral island of Modok and point to the compromised dreams at the centre of this text. La Gola del Diavolo, a sinister place of death, represents the underside of the colonial dream, providing the counterpoint to representations of Asmara as an earthly paradise. The images that haunt Lù emerge from the dark recesses of memory and imagination; an acknowledgement perhaps of the very painful process involved in the reconstruction of more disturbing memories.

Representations of colonial territory as an edenic space rely to a certain extent on images of a harmonious natural world, whilst a perfect climate is clearly inseparable from visions of 'un posto al sole'. This becomes most obvious in Marisa Baratti's recurring depictions of clear blue skies, gentle breezes, warm, scented air and a personified nature which embraces and caresses the Italian settlers. Moreover, such visions of paradise imply stasis and as such do not allow for sudden, catastrophic events to intrude on Asmara's perpetual springtime. In *La Gola del Diavolo*, however, Dell'Oro inverts these peaceful images to foreground the unpredictable and often violent side of nature. The harsh climatic conditions are characterised by scorching sun, fierce storms, torrential rain and lashing winds. The choice of language further stresses the ruthlessness

of the natural world: 'la terra che il vento frustava sollevandola in nubi di polvere rossa' (*Gola*, p. 7); 'le stelle, indifferenti alla loro angoscia, invadevano il cielo' (*Gola*, p. 30).

Even within the more idyllic images contained in the text there is a sense of the ephemeral nature of beauty and thus, by extension, the transient nature of the colonial dream. Lù senses impending doom in the golden light that surrounds the mountains and valley which she describes as 'un sortilegio prima del disastro' (*Gola*, p. 29). Descriptions of the town as 'un luminoso villaggio in cima a un altopiano' (*Gola*, p. 12) are later tempered with the intimation that this is not an eternal paradise but a short-lived dream. 'Bosco Fiorito appariva irreale nella luce dorata che precedeva l'oscurità. Era un luogo sospeso nell'oro del cielo e dell'aria, nell'attesa del buio che lo dissolvesse' (*Gola*, p. 80). There is, in all these images, an awareness that the Italian colonial presence in Eritrea is only a temporary state of affairs, a view that is reinforced by Obai the fortune teller when she predicts: 'Prima o poi se ne andranno, e non saranno più i padroni' (*Gola*, p. 79).

Lù and her group of friends undertake several journeys into the local countryside but once outside the protective universe of the colonial town, there is nothing welcoming about the exterior world. Instead, the terrain is inhospitable and conditions menacing. On one excursion, the children wander off in search of butterflies but dusk falls suddenly and they are unable to find their way home. They walk straight ahead, too afraid to turn around: 'Nessuno osava voltarsi. Immaginavano le iene che li seguivano con passi leggeri sulle goffe zampe attendendo il momento per saltare loro addosso' (*Gola*, p. 30). They fear encounters with dangerous animals such as poisonous snakes, hyenas, vultures, jackals or rabid monkeys (*Gola*, p. 108), monsters which are regular features of childhood imagination or nightmares but here in the African hills they become a genuine

threat. Dell'Oro's treatment of the danger presented by wildlife contrasts with Baratti's innocuous representation of the night time fauna: 'Ma io seguito a voltarmi indietro nella speranza di vedere uno sciacallino scodinzolante che ci segue perché ha deciso di diventare il mio cane' (*Era una volta*, p. 44).

The narrative culminates in the children's journey to the elusive Gola del Diavolo but en route to the ravine they are caught in a violent thunderstorm which marks the start of the rainy season (*Gola*, p. 98). The full strength of nature is emphasised here: 'All'improvviso parve che il cielo si stesse squarciando, in una rabbia fino allora compressa, fra bagliori e boati terribili' (*Gola*, p. 110, see also p. 104). The children's lives are again in danger as the torrential rain causes a mud slide which threatens to engulf them. On this occasion, as on prior occasions, the children are rescued by Aptè, a young boy from the indigenous community who befriends the children (*Gola*, p. 31). Aptè's presence, despite the fact that he is sick and disabled, is always reassuring: 'Tutto poteva accadere, ma c'era Aptè' (*Gola*, p. 57). He provides the white children with a sense of security, compensating for their lack of knowledge and experience: 'Erano con Aptè. Lui non poteva perdersi e sapeva evitare i pericoli' (*Gola*, p. 55). While searching for the children during the storm, Aptè seeks the help of Filepòs, an old hermit, whose reaction on hearing that the children are missing underscores the incongruity of white children in the Eritrean landscape: 'E cosa fanno "là" i ragazzi bianchi?' (*Gola*, p. 118). The children are portrayed as intruding into a space to which they do not belong. 'For the 'mendicante', the homeless child, the countryside is a known territory, while for the children who come from European families in Asmara the same terrain is mysterious

and forbidden.'[65] Whilst the indigenous Eritreans are shown to live in harmony with their natural surroundings, the white settlers are depicted as lacking sufficient understanding of their environment to enable them to survive.

The disparity between Baratti and Dell'Oro's depictions of nature indicates the latter's attempt to go beyond simplistic representations of the Italian colony as a utopian ideal. The natural world, the animal kingdom and the weather, rather than welcoming the settlers actually hinder the children's ability to survive outside the protective environment of the family home and are thus presented as obstacles to the European presence in Africa.

In *La Gola del Diavolo*, as in *Asmara addio* and *Era una volta*, the colonial world is refracted through the consciousness of a child. The childlike, almost fairytale perspective is conveyed through the 'minimalist, abrupt prose' of *La Gola*.[66] However, the child's vision of life diverges from the carefree images of childhood that characterise *Era una volta* and, to a certain extent, *Asmara addio*. In spite of the apparent 'eternity' and happiness of childhood, many problems intrude on the child's consciousness. Lù is a troubled child, she feels inadequate at school, fears her parents do not understand her and instead prefer her younger sister. More significantly, death, poverty and disease also encroach onto the child's world. She has to cope with the death of some of her closest companions, notably her younger sister Isabella whose spectral presence looms over the narrative and is one of the reasons that Lù is so anxious to discover the secrets of *La Gola del Diavolo*, the place of lost souls. Notions of an idyllic childhood are further punctured when Bri, a young Eritrean girl who works for Lù's family, is shot by

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[65] Erica Johnson, p. 210.
[66] Erica Johnson, p. 198.

Somalian soldiers (*Gola*, p. 63); Lù's friend Sakis, a young Greek boy, dies of an unnamed disease (*Gola*, p. 40) and her childhood sweetheart, Michele, also becomes one of the 'departed' when he leaves with his family for Italy (*Gola*, p. 76). The presence of death is felt more generally throughout the text as her great grandfather commits suicide, her grandfather; Alberto survives the jaws of a crocodile only to die a few days later from malaria (*Gola*, p.16); Ascalù the washer woman dies of old age (*Gola*, p. 28), and finally, after ensuring the children's safety, Aptè succumbs to a fever (*Gola*, p. 122).

For Lù's companions too there is a sense that childhood dreams have been corrupted by family breakdown, poverty and death. Cettina's family is reduced to poverty after the father abandoned them, leading Lù to observe: 'Sembravano poveri quasi come i neri' (*Gola*, p. 42). Worse still, Cettina is abused by her estranged father but keeps silent as she fears that no-one would believe her (*Gola*, pp. 81-82). Giorgio mourns the loss of a parent; all that remains of his father are distant memories and old photographs. The reader is told that the father is dead, but the child isn't given a satisfactory explanation (*Gola*, p. 88).

Lù's exploration of the periphery of the town and the surrounding countryside lead her to question the social and racial divisions of the colony and her position in relation to these hierarchies. The narrative consciousness offers a reflection on the system of apartheid or racial segregation that operates within the colony:

> In quel quartiere abitavano soltanto i bianchi, i neri stavano in misere case, nelle periferie lontane o fuori della città. Molti di loro facevano i domestici o i giardinieri degli europei. (*Gola*, p. 19)

> Non era mai stata nei quartieri dei neri, a nessuno degli abitanti della città veniva in mente di andarci.
>
> I neri stavano fuori dei quartieri ordinati di Bosco Fiorito, nella miseria, in una realtà che i bianchi non volevano vedere, non per il timore di rimanere turbati, ma per una totale mancanza di interesse. Era un altro mondo. (*Gola*, p. 45)

Lù becomes increasingly conscious of the existence of two very disparate worlds within the colony as whilst the Italians live a relatively privileged existence, the indigenous people live in designated areas characterised by poor housing, miserable conditions and are employed in low status activities, usually as domestic workers within Italian households. Even within the colonial town itself, poverty and disease impinge onto the child's consciousness. The constant presence of the old leper outside the bakery subverts edenic visions of colonial life (*Gola*, p. 41, p. 93).

In her friendships as a young child, Lù does not discriminate between white Europeans and black, Eritrean children. When her father objects to her association with Aptè, she insists: 'Non è mendicante [...] è un amico' (*Gola*, p. 35). Although as the child matures she becomes aware of the divisions of colonial society, the reasons behind these inequalities remain beyond her grasp. Lù recognises her privileged status but cannot understand why she is part of this group when other children will have very different future prospects: 'Abitavano insieme il mondo dell'infanzia, ma per un capriccio del caso o chissà quale ignorato disegno, lei era fra i privilegiati, protetti da altri destini' (*Gola*, p. 20). As Lù's awareness of other worlds around her expands, she starts to feel uncomfortable, perhaps sensing that she is somehow implicated in the injustice that she perceives: 'Lù avvertiva un confuso senso di colpa nei confronti di Aptè, e il bisogno di farsi capire, ma non trovava le parole' (*Gola*, p. 68). Her attempts to find answers to her questions are met with silence emphasising the unbridgeable gulf between the two communities:

> Lù chiese a Bri perché Aptè e altri come lui, che aveva visto per le strade del centro, fossero ridotti in quel modo. Lei non aveva risposto.
> Quando voleva eludere le domande fuggiva, con lo sguardo, in lontananze ignote. (*Gola*, p. 20).

The narrative voice becomes increasingly critical of the power structures within the community, frequently raising objections over the morality of the colonial enterprise: 'Erano i bianchi a considerarsi i padroni, nel paese dove, da sempre, abitavano i neri' (p 21). The comments relating to Bri's death further point to the lack of voice/power and social invisibility of the black community:

> La giustizia degli uomini non si mette mai dalla parte dei più deboli, degli emarginati, dei diversi.
> A loro viene tolta la voce.
> Bri non era Bianca.
> I neri contavano poco o niente, agli occhi dei bianchi, e la maggior parte, oltretutto, era povera. (*Gola*, p. 65)

In addition to discovering previously unknown areas of the town and local area, Lù also becomes aware of the existence of other worlds beyond the colony, contributing to a developing sense of space and a sense of her own place in the world. Together with Sakis, she looks at an atlas as he dreams of visiting Egypt, Ireland and Spain (*Gola*, p. 38). Italy, for a child growing up in Asmara, is seen as 'un luogo ai confini del mondo' (*Gola*, p. 76), a country which exists in facts and figures in school textbooks but not as an imagined reality. When Lù is told by a fortune teller that one day she will return to her own land, Lù protests 'ma questa *è* la mia terra' (*Gola*, p. 47), but the encounter opens up the possibility that there are other places to which she might belong and which might one day belong to her. Later, as Lù looks out from her window towards the night sky she ponders other possibilities of dwelling and other modes of existence: 'Chissà se dentro le luci lontane c'erano altre gole del diavolo, altre Lù, altri Aptè' (*Gola*, p. 61).

Lù's developing consciousness prompts her to question the values of the adults around her and leads to a gradual distancing from the adult community. She refuses to identify with the racism which is shown to be prevalent amongst her neighbours: 'Maledetti neri, diceva sempre la madre di Michele licenziando una dopo l'altra le donne

che servivano in casa, io non ne terrei nemmeno l'ombra se potessi, tutti uguali' (*Gola*, p. 59). The child's endless curiosity and desire to understand the world around her is juxtaposed with the limitations of adult consciousness. The adults in the text appear to exist in an insular world in which they reject anything outside their experience and ignore any elements that would disrupt their particular vision of the world. When Lù asks her father about stories of La Gola del Diavolo he dismisses them as 'tutte favole, invenzioni. Non c'è niente là in fondo' (*Gola*, p. 8). The blindness of the community to the suffering in their midst is reflected in the actions of an Italian woman who walks past a child begging in the street, ignoring her plight: 'Passò la bella signora bionda che a quell'ora raggiungeva al bar il marito. Guardava davanti senza vedere nulla intorno' (*Gola*, p. 91). The narrative thus points to the myopia of the Italian community and their apparent inability to acknowledge the problematic status of their colonial possessions.

> Fuggivano al rumore di Aptè che arrivava, o del bastone del cieco, o del pianto di un bimbo che chiedeva qualcosa, fuggivano a un fastidio, a un'incomprensibile accusa o allo specchio che rifletteva le immagini opposte delle loro precarie certezze. (*Gola*, pp. 118-19)

The adults' ability to perceive the world is inhibited by an image they have constructed in their minds which leads them to reject anything which does not correspond to this ideal. They fear that once they acknowledge imperfections, their fragile dreams of paradise will collapse. These comments can also be read as a criticism of the attitudes of groups of ex-colonials whose persistent denial of the underside of colonial life represents an attempt to sustain an idealised and nostalgic image of the past. By holding this image up to closer scrutiny, as she does in *La Gola del Diavolo*, Dell'Oro exposes its flawed nature.

Lù transgresses the boundaries of her community, ignoring the warnings of her parents who forbid her from roaming the streets (*Gola*, pp. 19, 35). By the end of the

text, Lù has distanced herself from the adult community both physically in her attempt to reach La Gola del Diavolo and mentally in her refusal to accept the values of the adult community. As Johnson points out, the children's journey to La Gola del Diavolo does not end with a homecoming.[67] Instead, the story ends with a reflection on the adult world and its inability to accept change:

> Erano lontani. Erano diversi. Una voce, e un profumo di fiori.
> Forse tutti gli adulti erano così. Il loro mondo di un tempo rimaneva impigliato fra i giorni, gli anni, e non riuscendo a uscirne lentamente moriva. (*Gola*, p. 125)

Lù's journey to La Gola del Diavolo, involves an awakening of childhood consciousness. It is however only a partial awakening because the child does not find the answers that she seeks and the children never do reach La Gola del Diavolo. The children's incomplete understanding of the world is underscored at the end of the text when they are elated at being rescued but Filepòs conceals Aptè's death and thus they do not appreciate the full cost of their safe return (*Gola*, p. 122).

CONCLUSION

Asmara addio and *La Gola del Diavolo* relate similar but different versions of childhood in Asmara. Johnson suggests that the rewriting of the stories in *Asmara addio* and *La Gola del Diavolo* emphasizes the craft of storytelling and the role of the writer.[68] Lù remembers and is able to relate the stories that have been passed down to her by her family, tales which have no doubt become embellished over time as in the case of her grandfather, Alberto:

> A Lù raccontarono poco di lui. Però tutti in famiglia narravano la storia della sua morte. [...] I parenti, nel tempo, raccontavano ognuno in modo diverso la storia, togliendo o aggiungendo particolari, finché si confuse, come spesso accade, la versione originale. (*Gola* p. 13)

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[67] Erica Johnson, p. 204.
[68] Erica Johnson, pp. 196-98.

The reader's attention is drawn not just to the possibility of different versions of Dell'Oro's autobiography, as Johnson points out, but the reworking and re-presentation of the story also foregrounds the constructed nature of memory and highlights the important role of memory in the construction of personal identity. What is remembered and what is forgotten is shown to depend very much on the people around us. Memories of our past are not just stories we tell ourselves but stories that others tell us about ourselves, which are repeated and reinforced over time.

La Gola del Diavolo, as a sinister place of lost stories represents the underside of the colonial dream, memories which have been repressed and which perhaps do not fit with constructions of Asmara as a heavenly space. The arduous journey towards the ravine signifies the painful process of acknowledging the more negative aspects of Italy's colonial presence in Africa. For the former colonial community it involves moving away from secure positions onto unfamiliar ground and a more precarious footing. It entails confrontation with the more unsettling aspects of colonial life which disrupts their nostalgic visions of the past.

As an Italian citizen with an experience of life elsewhere, Dell'Oro is trying to come to terms with her childhood memories, the legacy of Italy's colonial past and the impact on her own identity. Her texts both situate themselves within a body of nostalgic representations of Asmara, but also incorporate a criticism of such testimonies of the colonial past. Her texts reveal how memories of the past, especially those of childhood, are selective, tending to focus on positive aspects and as such can provide only a limited perspective on colonial life. Dell'Oro's reconstructions of childhood in *Asmara addio* and *La Gola del Diavolo* show that once one probes beneath the veneer of perfection,

paradise is not what it seems and the colonial dream is, from the very start, tainted by the violence that brought it into being.

CHAPTER 2

Writing Home: Images of Home and Displacement in Italian Women's Memories of South America

INTRODUCTION: THE MEANING OF HOME

In its broadest sense, travel involves moving away from a familiar home to an unfamiliar place and as such requires constant negotiation between origin and destination. Travel, understood as movement between two fixed places, implies a condition of settlement with the journey as the space in-between places. Home has been described as the very antithesis of the journey, being both the point of departure and frequently the intended point of return.[1] Eric Leed insists that the process of creating a home belongs to the history of travel. He emphasises the interdependency of travel and home, outlining various ways by which ethnicities become grounded in a particular location, a process which he refers to as the territorialization of place. These include the creating of myths and histories of landscapes, deeds and battles, the burial of the dead, mapping and marking of boundaries, and the immobility of certain parts of the population.[2] Leed argues that these methods that communities adopt in order to root themselves in landscape, or in other words, to establish a home, should be included in the history of travel.

It is not surprising therefore, that the notion of home is one of the major questions to emerge from recent critical studies on travel and migration. As the geographer Alison Blunt contends, 'travel is as much about constructions of '"home" as

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[1] Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 73. See also Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), p. 2.
[2] Leed, p. 18.

"away"'.[3] Travel, which facilitates contact with other people's homes, can change an individual's perception of place, leading at times to a nostalgic romanticising of the home that has been left behind. By enabling home to be viewed from an alternative perspective travel can have an unsettling effect on the traveller's sense of belonging to a fixed location. However, the home to which the traveller returns is rarely the same as the place s/he left and the traveller that returns is often radically changed by the experience: 'The home we return to is never the home we left, and the baggage we bring back with us will – eventually – alter it forever.'[4]

The trope of home is clearly central to any discussion of travel and all the more so in the case of migration which involves a prolonged absence from home. This chapter focuses on the various nuances of home in the context of Italian migration to South America and will discuss representations of home in a series of female-authored accounts of displacement, covering a range of fictional and autobiographical texts. Laura Pariani's *Quando Dio ballava il tango* is a fictitious account of women of Italian origin living in Argentina, whilst *Oxalà* (1997) by Maria Antonietta Garetto, *Il ritorno* (1998) by Carlina Lorenzini and *Quando le ombre si allungano* (2000) by Pia Ferrante are the private memoirs of three women who either migrated to or travelled extensively in South America. These four texts offer only a small glimpse at the question of displacement, and can be read from various perspectives.[5] My analysis, however, focuses on how textual constructions of home and metaphors of place and belonging are used to reflect the sometimes traumatic

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[3] Alison Blunt, 'Reading Mary Kingsley's Landscape Descriptions', in *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Post-colonial Geographies*, ed. by Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose (New York: Guilford, 1994), p. 68.

[4] George Robertson and others, eds, 'As the World Turns: Introduction', in *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1-6 (pp. 4-5).

[5] Displacement is defined by Angelika Bammer as: 'The separation of a people from their native culture either through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles, or expatriates) or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture.' See Angelika Bammer, ed., 'Introduction', in *Displacements: Cultural Identity in Question* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. xi-xx (p. xi).

experience of displacement. It examines how home is imagined from afar and the impact that moving away from home has on the representation of subjectivity.

Home is frequently depicted as a place of security and stability, a refuge which provides comfort and protection. It is often associated with rootedness and fixity. At least in western cultures, a house is defined in opposition to types of residence which are considered to be less permanent or of lesser value, such as hotel, tent or *capanna*. Being at home refers, of course, to more than the appropriation of a physical building; it also denotes a sense of attachment to both a location and a community of people who hold similar values, traditions, beliefs and memories of a shared past. In English, *house* is generally used to designate the physical building whilst *home* denotes a more personalised space referring to a sense of belonging to a place and its community. The Italian *casa* refers both to the dwelling place and conveys a deep sense of being rooted in one location. Similarly, Erica Johnson defines home as being more than simply a physical building or dwelling place. For her, home is an architectural, psychological, geographical and social concept. She claims that 'the notion of being at home hinges on material dwelling places as well as on abstract categories of belonging or residing chez soi'.[6]

Yet, many critical studies point to the ambivalent meanings of home. As the sociologist Avtar Brah points out, home 'can simultaneously be a place of safety and terror'.[7] Likewise, Zygmunt Bauman claims that '"home" lingers at the horizon of the tourist life as an uncanny mixture of shelter and prison'.[8] The motivations for departure and the forms of travel undertaken are often tied up with the individual's experience of home. The tourist's journey represents an escape from the security of

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[6] Johnson, p. 13.
[7] Avtah Brah, 'Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities', in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 615.
[8] Bauman, p. 31.

the mundane. In contrast, migrants, refugees and exiles often travel in search of a safe home. Depending on one's place and status in the world, home can be experienced as a place of comfort and refuge or, alternatively, as a site of oppression and moving away from home can represent liberation or exile.

Identities too are bound up in our experience of the place we call home. Where we are born, the community to which we profess to belong and with it our inherited positions of privilege or disadvantage, all impact upon how home is viewed as well as the likelihood of leaving it behind. Various cultural critics have claimed that home is an important factor in the construction of subjectivity. 'Identity', write David Morley and Kevin Robins, 'is also a question of memory and memories of "home" in particular.'[9] Inderpal Grewal claims that '"Home" is a crucial category within European travel because it is the space of return and of consolidation of the Self enabled by the encounter with the "Other"'.[10] As the introduction to this thesis showed, the encounter with another culture, class, language, race or ethnic group can be said to play an important part in the construction and consolidation of both personal and national identities. If identities are constructed through systems of exclusion and difference then travel can serve to reinforce one's own sense of self and sense of belonging to a place called home.

Likewise, Rosemary Marangoly George argues that home is built around a pattern of inclusions and exclusions: 'Home is a way of establishing difference. Homes and home-countries are exclusive.'[11] A secure home is constructed in order to create a personal and private territory offering protection and shelter to one group of people but at the same time, it shuts others out. The relationship between home,

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[9] David Morley and Kevin Robins, 'No Place Like *Heimat*: Images of Home(land) in European Culture', in *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*, ed. by Erica Carter and others (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), pp. 3-31 (p. 10).
[10] Grewal, p. 6.
[11] George, p. 2.

community and identity and the exclusionary practices involved in the construction of home is explored by Minnie Bruce Pratt in her autobiographical essay: 'Identity: Skin Blood Heart'. [12] As a white, Christian-raised, lesbian feminist living in Washington D.C., Pratt questions the conditions of her secure childhood home in Alabama showing that notions of a stable home and fixed identity were achieved only through the exclusion of others and at the expense of negating certain aspects of the self. For Pratt, community belonging entailed the construction of a homogeneous group of people and as such was predicated on racist and heterosexual privilege, and the suppression of difference. Transgressing the boundaries of home, both geographically and metaphorically, was a necessary step towards asserting her own sense of who she was, yet the loss of home and community involved a certain amount of estrangement. In their discussion of Pratt's essay, Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty comment:

> "Being home" refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; "not being home" is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself.[13]

Doreen Massey makes similar points to those of Pratt, although as a geographer her arguments inevitably surround the construction of places rather than personal identity and subjectivity. [14] She acknowledges that the relationship between community and place has become increasingly difficult to sustain; communities are not necessarily place bound and neither do places contain people with an identical

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[12] Minnie Bruce Pratt, 'Identity: Skin Blood Heart', in *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism*, ed. by Elly Bulkin and others (New York: Long Haul Press, 1984). For an analysis of Pratt's essay, see Biddy Martin & Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?', in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 191-212. For a further analysis of Pratt's essay see Caren Kaplan, 'Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse', in *Cultural Critique*, 6 (1987), 187-98.

[13] Martin and Mohanty, p. 196.

[14] See Doreen Massey, 'Double Articulation: A Place in the World', in *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*, ed. by Angelika Bammer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 110-21. See also Doreen Massey, *Place, Space and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), in particular chapters 7-9.

history, outlook and goals. Like Pratt, Massey shows how attempts to construct places as a natural home for some necessarily excludes the perspectives of others, often those of women and immigrants: ideas of the London Docklands as a white working-class area are predicated upon racism, whilst images of mining communities are constructed from the perspective of patriarchal control. She argues against any attempts to capture an essential essence of place, showing how such nostalgic images are often harnessed for commercial or political aims. Massey insists that places (or homes) have no single past and there is no single way of looking at them. Instead, they are complex articulations, constructed through, rather than against, their relations with the outside world.

In her discussion of home in the imagination of a group of middle-class Canadian tourists, Julia Harrison claims that home both unites and differentiates tourists from migrants, refugees and exiles. They are all united in their experience of leaving home, yet for transnationals there is no easy return home.[15] Transnationals, she claims, 'challenge any idea of the fixedness of any culture to a particular place'.[16] In a world of increasing globalization and mass human migration, the very concept of home as a fixed place of origin becomes far more problematic. For many displaced persons, the spatial distinction between home and away, if it were ever so distinct, has become even more ambiguous. Or, as David Morley and Kevin Robins argue: 'In a world of expanding horizons and dissolving boundaries, [...] places are no longer the clear supports of our identity.'[17] The place that refugees and migrants leave behind is rarely experienced as a secure, protective home and in addition, they may face a hostile reception in the country where they seek refuge. They may be

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[15] Julia D. Harrison, 'Travelling Home', *Journeys: The International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing*, 2:2 (2002), 29-49 (pp. 30-1). Harrison uses the term transnational to refer to migrants, exiles and refugees.
[16] Harrison, p. 29.
[17] Morley and Robins, p. 5.

prevented from returning to their country of origin and yet unable to feel a sense of attachment to their new environment, where they are considered outsiders.

For the children born to such migrants, their relationship to home and a homeland becomes increasingly complex. Where is their home? Is it where they were born and raised, or where their parents and grandparents come from? Madan Sarup in his article 'Home and Identity' voices the many questions which arise from his personal experience of migration. Born in India and educated in Britain where he lived from the age of nine, he lost his mother when he was five years old, his father at seventeen, and was not able to speak his native tongue:

> It is usually assumed that a sense of place or belonging gives a person stability. But what makes a place home? Is it wherever your family is, where you have been brought up? The children of many migrants are not sure where they belong. Where is home? Is it where your parents are buried? Is home the place from where you have been displaced, or where you are now? Is home where your mother lives?[18]

In *Home, Maison, Casa*, Erica Johnson explores the concept of home in texts written by three authors who were born to European parents in various colonial contexts and later 'repatriated' to Europe as young women.[19] She too demonstrates how, in the postcolonial situations she examines, fixed categories of home and away, centre and periphery are unsustainable. As discussed in the previous chapter, Johnson proposes the term *terragraphica* to denote a homelike place from which to write and shows how the authors she discusses use the lands of their birth as their *terragraphica* in the absence of a terra firma.[20] Although Johnson's work focuses on European settlers in colonial contexts rather than the experience of a woman of Indian origin living in Britain, it nevertheless raises questions quite similar to those expressed by Sarup: what is the meaning of home and homeland to a child born and raised in a colonial location by European parents? Is home where the parents are

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[18] Madan Sarup, p. 94.
[19] Johnson discusses the postcolonial novels of Jean Rhys, Marguerite Duras and Erminia Dell'Oro. For her interpretation of Dell'Oro, see Chapter 1 of this thesis.
[20] Johnson, pp. 27-8.

from or where the child has been brought up? What are the consequences for subjectivity on discovering that the place one referred to as home belongs to someone else? The above examples illustrate the difficulties involved in defining the meaning of home and the problems inherit in grounding identities in a fixed location. For many migrants and the children born to them, home is not necessarily the place where they were born or where their parents were born. It may not even be the place where they live, just as it could be a place to which they have never been.

Gender adds a further dimension to the various permutations of home which again has a bearing upon travel, that is, one's possibilities of staying or leaving home. Rosemary Marangoly George asserts: 'The word "home" immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection.'[21] Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose discuss how the social construction of gender difference establishes some spaces as women's and others as men's, although they insist that that contestation and renegotiation of social meanings of space is always possible. [22] In many communities, but middle-class European ones in particular, women have long been associated with the domestic space of the home. George examines the way in which early twentieth-century guidebooks identified English women with the home, even using home as a metaphor for her body, reflecting a belief that home was an expression of the personality of the woman of the house.[23] Home was, and arguably for many women still is, a space which places particular social demands upon women and where patriarchal gender relations are played out with inevitable repercussions on women's ability to travel. Travelling away from home can thus represent a challenge to patriarchal authority,

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[21] George, p. 1.
[22] Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, 'Introduction: Women's Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies', in *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*, ed. by Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose (London: Guilford, 1994), pp. 1-25 (p. 3).
[23] George, p. 23.

perhaps entailing a rejection of socially constructed gender roles, or a way of claiming an identity that is not easily accessible within the confines of home.

Travel too is a gendered, or gendering, experience. In discourses of travel the sessile condition of women provides the counterpoint for the male journey. The travelling exploits of the archetypal male traveller, Odysseus, are set against the home-boundedness of his wife Penelope, who waits patiently and faithfully for twenty years until his return.[24] In view of these persistent discursive associations of women with fixity, home and domesticity, it should not be surprising if the trope of home resonates strongly in the writing of women migrants, whether or not they operate to subvert or affirm such social constructions.

ITALIAN MIGRATION TO SOUTH AMERICA

The relationship between Italian migrants and their homes is a major theme in Donna Gabaccia's study of Italian migration, *Italy's Many Diasporas*. Gabaccia claims that Italian migrants demonstrated a strong attachment to their home regions and suggests that the high rate of return (over half of Italian migrants returned to Italy) was partly a result of the magnetism that the local village held over its members abroad.[25] Gabaccia argues that the patterns of migration from Italy reflect the loyalty of Italians to their native town or village and that this sense of allegiance, often referred to as *campanilismo*, was put above any sense of national identity. It is no coincidence then that the Italian word *paese* refers to both the local village and the country. The importance of the home is also conveyed in the proverb 'tutto il mondo è paese' which, according to Gabaccia, reflects the diasporic way of life familiar to many

[24] See Introduction of this thesis, pp. 22.
[25] Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, p. 60.

Italians.[26] It suggests that the world is a global village and that the intimacy of the hometown can be recreated elsewhere.

Proportionally, more Italians than other Europeans migrated to Latin America where they worked on the construction of railroads and cities or as labourers on the pampas of Argentina and the plantations of Brazil. After 1900, 3 million Italians went to Argentina and 1.5 million to Brazil.[27] Argentina in particular represented a land of promise, modernity and progress, the embodiment of making it in *La Mèrica*.[28] By 1940 there were more Italians in Buenos Aires alone than in the whole of Italy's colonial possessions in Africa and, even today, 15 million of Argentina's 27 million residents are of recent Italian descent.[29] Repeated seasonal migration was a common feature of travel to South America. Many male migrants, referred to as *golondrine* (swallows) journeyed to Argentina for harvest in the southern hemisphere, returning to Italy in time for harvest in Europe. For many, adjusting to home after a sojourn abroad was problematic; home was no longer the same and the home community no longer viewed them as the same, often referring to the migrants as Americans.[30]

The majority of Italian sojourners to South America were male, either young, single men in search of fortune or husbands hoping to provide financial security for their families back home in Italy. Their wives, referred to as 'white widows' were frequently left behind to wait, often in vain, for their husbands to return.[31] However, approximately a third of Italian migrants to South America were women. The Italian

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[26] See Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, pp. 3, 174.
[27] Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, pp. 5, 93.
[28] The term *La Mèrica* was used by many Italians to refer to the continents of North and South America and not just the United States. See Arnd Schneider, *Futures Lost: Nostalgia and Identity among Italian Immigrants in Argentina* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 19. See also Samuel Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City 1870-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).
[29] Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* p. 177, Schneider, pp. 19, 316.
[30] Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, pp. 95, 99.
[31] Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, pp. 83, 87.

female presence was most notable in Argentina, where as the Italian community was longer established, many women had travelled to join their partners abroad. According to Gabaccia the arrival of Italian women in the Americas represented an important stage of migration and settlement, facilitating permanent settlement through reproduction and signalled the beginning of permanent attachments to the new homeland.[32]

LAURA PARIANI: *QUANDO DIO BALLAVA IL TANGO*

Many of the features of Italian migration to Argentina, documented by scholars such as Donna Gabaccia, Samuel Baily and Arnd Schneider, (the phenomenon of *golondrine* or seasonal workers on the Argentine pampas, the magnetism of home village, the desertion of 'white widows', Argentina as embodiment of the American dream and the role reversal between Argentina and Italy in the face of changing economic fortunes), are highlighted in *Quando Dio ballava il tango*, Laura Pariani's intimate portrait of women in Argentina. Pariani was born in 1951 in Busto Arsizio (VA) and grew up in Magnano (BI) where many members of this community including her grandfather migrated to South America. Since the release of Pariani's first literary work, *Di corno o d'oro*, in 1993, she has published over ten novels. Her first journey to Argentina is featured in *Il pettine* (1995) and *La straduzione* (2004). Her later works include a series of interviews with Argentinians of Italian origin, *Il paese dei sogni perduti: anni e storie argentine*, and a travel journal, *Patagonia blues*.[33]

In its telling of a history of Italian migration from a female perspective, *Quando Dio ballava il tango* captures the problematic elements of home and displacement. It

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[32] Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, pp. 7-8.
[33] Laura Pariani, *Il paese dei sogni perduti: anni e storie argentine* (Milan: Effigie, 2004); *Patagonia blues* (Milan: Effigie, 2006).

weaves the individual testimonies of sixteen fictional women protagonists into the account of six families, and a hundred years of Argentine history including Peronism, the death of Evita, the military junta of 1976-83, the plight of the *desaparecidos* and the economic crisis of recent years. The melancholic tales reveal the impact of migration on generations of women, their abandonment, betrayal and abuse at the hands of their adventuring male counterparts. Pariani's protagonists are women who are left behind, women who wait in vain for their husbands to return and women who are uprooted from one hemisphere to another to follow their families to *la Mèrica.* However, these women are not passive but stoical figures, family heads, workers and political activists. They are referred to as 'rabbiose penelopi' who take life, or at times even death, into their own hands (p. 294).

This text is a highly stylised literary representation, with an intricate structure and involves a sophisticated blending of languages and dialects. The cultural encounter between Italy and Argentina is reflected in the blending of standard Italian, older Italian dialectical expressions and Spanish, which captures the melange of languages of the cosmopolitan metropolis of Buenos Aires whilst retaining a sense of the local. The tango referred to in the title reveals its own migratory history. It originated and developed as a fusion of cultures and musical influences within the immigrant communities of Buenos Aires, travelled to Europe where it was changed and transformed before returning to South America in its hybrid version.[34] The cadence and structure of the text also resemble that of tango; a complex dance charged with emotive force, with its themes of passion, melancholy, torment, despair and tragedy reinforcing the experiences of its women protagonists. As one character, Martinita

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[34] See Eduardo P. Archetti, *Masculinities: Football, Polo, and the Tango in Argentina* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), p. 131.

Colombo, explains: 'vuoto, desolazione... sono espressioni che si trovano soltanto nei tanghi' (p. 279).

Each of the sixteen chapters is dedicated to a different female protagonist and opens with a verse from a tango which provides both its subtitle and theme. For example, the first chapter is dedicated to Venturina Majna, subtitled 'il passato che torna' and opens with an extract from Alfredo Le Pera's *Volver*, which points both to the circular structure of the text and the circularity of Italian migration to South America. The central character of the text, Corazón Bellati, was born in 1952 into a family of Italian migrants living in Buenos Aires. This was the time when, according to a popular saying, God danced the tango: a time when Argentina was the epitome of modernity and represented a land of promise to Italian migrants. However, after Corazón's husband is killed by the military junta in 1976, she finds that her political associations have placed her under threat and so she escapes to Italy along with her daughter Malena. The first chapter, set in 1978, relates Corazón Bellati's arrival at her ancestral home, a small village in Lombardy called Cascina Malpensata, where she meets Venturina Majna, her paternal grandmother. The text concludes with Corazón revisiting Argentina and collating many of the accounts that are presented in the text. It is not just the physical journey which comes full circle, but the text also demonstrates the reversal of fortunes for Italy and Argentina. The final chapter demonstrates how, after years of military dictatorship, war and economic instability, popular images of Argentina have changed. Italy is now 'la vera America' – the destination of choice for present-day migrants (p. 295).

Although only one chapter bears her name, Corazón Bellati could be considered the central character of the text, whose presence at different stages provides some continuity across generations and between the various women's accounts. She

appears as a child, a young woman at university, in the first chapter as a migrant to Italy and in the final chapter as a woman of almost fifty years of age revisiting Argentina. Corazón's journey is an inversion of the journey undertaken by migrants who left Italy for Argentina in the first half of the twentieth century. She also acts as a mirror image of the author's life: Pariani was born in Busto Arsizio, Varese in 1951, whilst the fictional Corazón was born in Buenos Aires in 1952. Pariani's father left the family when he migrated to South America and Laura Pariani went to Argentina for the first time in 1966 to trace her paternal relatives. Similarly, Corazón travels to Italy in 1978 to trace her Italian ancestors.

Quando Dio ballava il tango represents an attempt to reconnect the broken threads of the lives of generations of women from late 1800s to the twenty-first century and thus to reconstruct a female genealogy which reveals the level of interconnectedness between families of Italian migrants. Corazón and Venturina have very different life histories, in two opposing hemispheres, yet their origins can be traced back to the same distant past which provides the key to understanding their present:

> La Venturina e Corazón; ognuna seguendo il filo di due vite diversissime che non si mescolano l'una con l'altra, ma armonizzano nonostante tutto, perché in qualche punto della distanza che le separa compongono una risposta. Dato che sono nonna e nipote. (p. 28)

In the first chapter, the reader is presented with five generations of one family: the photograph of Adalgisa Majna (1871-1899), her daughter Venturina Majna (1892-1981), Venturina's granddaughter, Corazón Bellati (1952-) and Corazón's young daughter, Malena Caretta (1973-). Each woman's life bears the scars of migration. Adalgisa's husband Antonio Majna was the first in the family to leave the village in search of seasonal work in South America. Every year, on returning to Cascina Malpensata, he found it increasingly difficult to adjust to life back in Italy and became consumed with nostalgia for Argentina. Antonio migrated definitively in

1898, abandoning his Italian family for a young *Indios* girl named Pilar. His wife, Adalgisa, was left behind to bring up her three daughters including Venturina. Although Venturina remained in Italy, her son Filippo Bellati (Corazón's father) also migrated to Argentina in 1946 where he married Dulce Colombo, a distant relative from same northern Italian village. He too left his wife for a second family, fathering a child with the granddaughter of Pilar, Provisoria Paz Majna. A family chart as the start of the text offers some assistance in untangling this bewilderingly complex web of family relations. The intertwining histories of the six families show how migration is not just about an individual journey, but how the phenomenon impacts upon an entire community.

The notion of home resonates throughout the text and the motivations for travel stem from different ways of experiencing home. For the older generations in particular, the opportunities for travel and motivations for leaving home tend to map out along gendered lines. Italian women from an impoverished village in the north of Italy in the early twentieth century are depicted as having little prospects for independent travel and no real choice over their destiny/destination. Perhaps it is also significant then that tango, in its most traditional form, is a complex travelling dance in which the woman follows the man and is given little room for independent movement.[35] Women such as Adalgisa Majna become 'white widows' when their husbands start a new life abroad, some women migrate along with their families, whilst others are sent to marry men from their village already living in Argentina. As Venturina Majna comments:

> Loro liberi di andarsene per il mondo, ché son solamente le montagne che restano al loro posto. Le montagne e noi donne; sempre qui a aspettare, a non chiedere, a non pretendere, a non seccare. (p. 17)

[35] For a discussion of tango as male discourse and cultural performance of gender relations see Archetti, pp. 133-56.

Venturina testifies here to the immobility of women of her generation which contrasts with the opportunities that were opening up to men at the beginning of the twentieth century. She likens women to mountains; although static they show fortitude in the face of abandonment and their strength obtains from their sense of place, or from knowing where they belong. Despite their immobility, migration supplies a constant backdrop to the lives of women in Cascina Malpensata. Mafalda Cerruti migrated to Argentina with her family at fifteen years of age, yet even before her departure the absence of the male members of the community led to an awareness of the presence of distant places outside the limits of her experience:

> Una terra, la sua, segnata dall'esodo dei maschi. In ogni casa, sulla credenza, lettere e cartoline: dal Canada, da San Francisco, dall'Australia, da Montevideo, posti di là dal mare, di cui le donne pronunciavano i nomi con angustia e timore, come se si trattasse di trappole misteriose che potevano inghiottirsi figli, fidanzati, mariti. (p. 161)

Those women who are left behind suffer their own form of dislocation as the village they call home is transformed by outward migration and by the discovery that their centre has now become the periphery of their husbands' and sons' lives. Whether they stay behind or join their partners abroad, it is the female characters who absorb the impact of migration as they are less able to flee from their family responsibilities. As Provisoria Paz Majna muses when Filippo Bellati leaves her after she tells him she is expecting his child: 'Sua zia Encarnada le diceva sempre che gli uomini vanno e vengono, solo i figli rimangono' (p. 159).

Women in Argentina, most notably the younger generations, are shown to have greater possibilities for travel, but still their desire to leave is linked to their experience of home. Regalada Majna's small wooden house in Esperanzita symbolises her feelings towards the life in the village, 'una vita immobile e senza vie d'uscita; una gabbia, di quelle piccole, di vimini, dove si mettono i pappagalli quando li si portano al mercato' (p. 58-60). The monotony of the small town

contrasts with the bright lights and tall, elegant *palazzi* of Buenos Aires, where she dreams of finding her father. For other female characters in the text, home in Argentina disintegrates into a place of domestic abuse and violence. When Martinita Colombo leaves home to escape a violent father and an overbearing mother, her home had become 'una terribile trappola da cui fuggire' (p. 276). Another dimension to the migrant experience of home is provided by Raquel Potok, a Jewish woman of Polish origin, who flees from her home in Poland during the 1930s to escape racial persecution (p. 116).

On the other hand, the men of Cascina Malpensata are represented as restless adventurers who leave Italy in search of new experiences, indulge in fleeting romances and reject permanent attachments whether to place or to relationships. Home for these men is a suffocating place from which they need to escape in order to find freedom and follow their dreams. Pietro Colombo 'voleva la libertà' and was seeking 'un posto dove esser libero di fare i fatti miei' (pp. 90-91). Even in Argentina, men show the same desire to escape confines of the home: Ángel Colombo moves from Rosedal to Mendoza in search of 'una nuova vita' (p. 185), whilst his brother Ambrogio also leaves home because 'in casa Colombo si soffocava' (p. 111).

Still others leave Italy in a desperate attempt to escape poverty and hunger, dreaming of a more prosperous life in *La Mèrica*. For those prompted to leave home by social and economic hardships, Argentina holds up tantalising images of modernity. Such men, usually husbands, travel in search of work in order to provide a better life for their families. Agabio Cerutti took his family to Argentina lured by descriptions of South America as a Promised Land where 'la gente mangiava carne tutto il giorno' (p. 167).

The text shows the role that the male network of associations plays in persuading others to leave. The male characters who return to Italy, albeit temporarily, arrive back with exaggerated tales of exotic women and newfound wealth which generates a desire for migration in others. The men are drawn to South America by images of the open spaces of the pampas, the wilds of Patagonia or the excitement of Buenos Aires. The wide and luminous spaces of Argentina represent the migrants' ideas of Argentina as a land of opportunity which held out promises of a long and bright future. In contrast, the only chapter which unfolds in Italy is set inside a gloomy, airless, old house, thus configuring the Italian village as dark, insular and backward. The 'atmosfera di chiuso' of home in a small village is contrasted with the 'praterie slargate' of the pampas (p. 14). Corazón imagines how Antonio Majna would have reacted on returning to Cascina Malpensata after his sojourns in Argentina: 'Come deve essersi sentito prigioniero in questa cascina buia, al suo ritorno dall'America, dopo aver assaggiato l'ampiezza luminosa degli spazi argentini' (p. 14).

The women's experience of the open spaces of Argentina, however, is quite different. When seen from the perspective of the female characters, the landscape of Argentina appears brutal and oppressive with the descriptions focusing on the scorching heat, penetrating dust and overbearing sky. Raquel Potok refers to 'quel largo cielo grigio pesante che sembrava toccare la terra' (p. 121). Maria Roveda too appears vulnerable in such a hostile environment and runs back into her house for shelter:

> Il paesaggio la opprimeva, con quell'aria da forno, col suo sole che si alzava come una grande palla rossa dal mare di polvere e compagnava l'andare della gente fino al tramonto senza un minuto d'ombra. Solo, ogni tanto, qualche arbusto spinoso e rachitico, che non bastava però a difendere da quella luce spietata; tra le grida degli avvoltoi, alti in cerchio nel cielo. (p. 98)

The vast spaces do not offer the same appeal for the women in Argentina. Instead they leave them vulnerable, exposed to the elements. Home thus becomes a site of shelter and relative protection.

Having a secure and stable place to live is an important step in the development of a sense of allegiance to their destination. When Pietro Colombo migrates to South America, he wants to build a house in Argentina so his children can be born in their own home. Living in a house of their own represents an attempt to forge a sense of belonging to the new place by recreating the same sense of security and rootedness that he felt in Italy (p. 87). However, it takes time for roots to grow in the new environment. Eusebio Caretta and Socorro López finally live in a house which is characterised by: 'stanze solide, erette lentamente con i pietroni del pedregal vicino, con grandi travi di cipresso' (p. 240). The solid construction indicates that Eusebio has made his home in Argentina, yet its slow construction emphasises the time required for these new roots to develop.

The difference between male and female approaches to travel is linked in the text with different perspectives of the past and future. The male characters claim they are leaving to seek a better future, whilst Venturina Majna refers to this as simply 'una balla giustificatoria per l'abbandono, la fuga, magari pure il tradimento' (p. 17). The female characters are depicted as the custodians of memory and tradition as such they are associated with the past. Although, at times, this appears a rather essentialising technique, the past here does not represent an attachment to an anachronistic way of life. Instead, it has positive connotations of interconnectedness and belonging; the past gives meaning to the present, helping the women to understand who they are and where they come from.

The importance of keeping memories alive is highlighted by another character, Catterina Cerutti who goes to the cemetery every week to tend the graves of her loved ones. She bemoans what she sees as the current tendency to neglect memories: 'A 'sto mondo-qui non c'è più rispetto per la memoria' (p. 68). In Corazón, she finds the person who will become the depository for her memories, someone who will 'ereditare la memoria' (p. 70). Mafalda Cerutti too believes in the importance of memories of her past home for her identity in the present: 'Se una perde i ricordi, non le resta più niente... Si aggrappava a piccoli esercizi mnemonici per ricostruire il suo paese in Italia, il bosco, la cascata' (p. 163). Corazón's mother-in-law, Socorro López, hands her a box of photographs, letters and newspaper cuttings, representing a way of passing family memories through to the next generation: 'Le piaceva l'idea di forgiare un altro anello nella catena delle generazioni' (p. 248).

Storytelling is another way in which the women in *Quando Dio ballava il tango* attempt to pass on memories to future generations. Again Corazón is central to this process as she is the person that the other women entrust with their stories. Her personal attempt to revive the accounts of women migrants operates as a frame narrative to the text which is based around her attempt to collate material including recordings and interviews for a documentary about Italo-Argentines. Corazón's journey is also a journey into the past which involves research into her own family ancestry: 'Il suo viaggio è una fuga nel passato [...] E questa cascina nella valle del Ticino è la terra della memoria' (p. 20).

The women's attachment to memory is contrasted with the men who, in their search for the future, discard the past. They flee from fixity, seeking out momentary excitement and temporary romantic liaisons (p. 205). In its casting of women as pre-modern guardians of the past, the text also operates as a damning critique of modern

society. The present, according to Catterina Cerutti is characterised by 'spazzatura che domani se dovrà buttare', or 'giocattoli di plastica che si rompono in un minuto' (pp. 69-71). The past, on the other hand is 'tiepidezza di una coperta di lana, sapore pieno di un buon bicchiere di vino tinto, profumo della terra, eco di antiche canzoni' (p. 69). The text suggests that this willingness to disregard the past is a reflection of male attitudes to migration in which there appears to be no value in permanent attachments to people or place. Women, children, and homes alike, are thrown aside in the name of progress. The true cost of migration is bourne by these women who are left behind or who are forced to break the links with their past.

The text further highlights the consequences of displacement on subjectivity and in particular, the debilitating effect of nostalgia for a former home. When Antonio Majna returns from Argentina he has been transformed by his experiences on the other side of the world: 'Chi torna dopo un periodo di emigrazione non è mai chi è partito, anche se continua a chiamarsi con lo stesso nome di prima; ché è solo questo a mantenersi costante, nient'altro' (p. 15). This indicates a radical alteration in subjectivity, he no longer feels at home in Italy. However, the loss of the former self is not always presented as a positive thing. 'Si muore sempre un po' quando si parte, non lo dice anche il proverbio' (pp. 68-9).

Although set mainly in Argentina, the text always has one eye focused on Italy as a site of nostalgia and loss. Mafalda Cerruti left Italy with her family when she was fifteen but feels that in Argentina everything is out of place:

> In questo paese estraneo Mafalda si sentiva insicura, spogliata di una identità che fin da piccola aveva creduto inalienabilmente sua. [...] Ché a quell'epoca io sapevo da che parte del mondo stavo, e ogni cosa nella vita era al suo posto. (p. 169)

The impossibility of returning home and the paralyzing effect of nostalgia for a former home is reinforced by the references to the wife of Lot (pp. 216, 225). Her story underlines the difficulties in leaving home behind and also the gender

implications of migration. Whilst men gaze towards the future, women look longingly to the comforts of the past.

In the work of Laura Pariani, fiction and non-fictional representations of travel intersect. Giuseppe Mazzocchi has commented on the capacity of Pariani's earlier work to blend fiction with autobiography and other historical events: 'Il tratto distintivo della scrittrice è la fusione fra vita e cultura. Vicenda autobiografica e ricerca intellettuale si intersecano costantemente.'[36] Although loosely based on research into her own family, Pariani's account of women migrants in South America in *Quando Dio ballava il tango* remains a fictionalised account of migration. Her later work, *Il paese dei sogni perduti*, claims to be a factual reconstruction of the memories of Italian migrants, assembled from interviews that the author carried out with people she met in 2003. Yet, she admits that these interviews are not precise transcriptions of conversations, rather they have been adapted with the aim of providing a wider picture of the question of displacement: 'In queste pagine, perciò, ai ricordi individuali ho mescolato la memoria civica.'[37] Her work therefore covers the whole range of fiction and non-fiction, yet the personal memories of people who migrated to the Americas and their descendents are clearly central to her work. Whilst her work is based on oral testimonies of migrants and their families, similar experiences are documented in unpublished personal diaries and memoirs. The remainder of this chapter will examine the private memoirs of three women who either emigrated or travelled extensively in South America. The texts that will be discussed are from *L'Archivio Diaristico Nazionale* in Pieve Santo Stefano (Arezzo); they are practically unknown texts and, with the exception of Ferrante, are written by unpublished authors. In comparison with Pariani, the language, structure and style

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[36] Giuseppe Mazzocchi, 'La spada e la luna', *Italica*, 74.3 (1997), 375-91 (p. 375).
[37] See Pariani, *Il paese dei sogni perduti*, p. 8.

they use appears simple and unelaborate, although all three texts were submitted for an annual competition and, as a result, sometimes appear overly eager to assert themselves as literary texts.

In view of the location of the archive, there is an inevitable bias towards the region of Tuscany in the origins of the writers that will be discussed. However, to a certain extent this could be said to reflect the fact that the majority of migrants to South America came from Central and Northern Italy. As with Pariani's novel, these memoirs comment on major events of Italian and world history. The writers were all born during the Fascist period and their memoirs reveal much about the experiences of women during the Second World War. However, the main focus of these memoirs is the impact moving away from home has on identity, and the works offer a fascinating insight into the psychological effects of displacement on women migrants. My analysis of the texts again examines the three women's relation to the space of domestic interiors and physical dwelling places as well as their relationship towards the wider community, showing not only how these women's perception of their physical abode is crucial to their sense of self and sense of place but also how factors such as gender and class interact to affect their sense of home and belonging.

Oxalà, the first text under discussion, was written by Maria Antoinetta Sartoris Garetto. Garetto was born to Italian parents living in Argentina and, apart from a brief period in Italy during the Second World War, has spent her entire life in South America. In her autobiography, however, she writes of Tuscany as her natural and psychological home and represents her life in Argentina and Brazil as a period of exile. The problem of the return home is highlighted by the memoirs of another woman, Carlina Lorenzini whose parents migrated to Argentina shortly after her birth and returned to Italy when she was nine years old. *Il ritorno* (1998) details her

feelings of alienation on her return to Italy after her early childhood in Buenos Aires. Lorenzini relates the difficulties she faces trying to fit into a community from which she feels excluded and adjusting to a place that, initially at least, she is unable to call home. The final writer, Pia Ferrante, is a well-travelled Venetian woman who is unable to settle in one fixed place and expresses a constant desire to be 'elsewhere'. *Quando le ombre si allungano* (2000) demonstrates her aversion to fixed, unchanging situations and shows how moving away from home plays an essential role in her search for knowledge and fulfilment in the outside world.

MARIA ANTONIETTA GARETTO, *OXALÀ*

Maria Antonietta Garetto was born in 1921 in Argentina where she was raised by Italian parents. Her father had originally emigrated from Italy to Argentina to work as a doctor for the railway company. The family often spent their summer vacations with their relatives in Tuscany before moving back to Italy just before the outbreak of the Second World War. After the war, they returned to South America, this time to Brazil, where Garetto lived with her husband, Giorgio (also of Italian origin), until her death in 2003. Written between 1980 and 1991, *Oxalà* is an autobiographical account which focuses on the alienation that Garetto felt in South America after many of her friends had left, and her deep longing for Italy, the place which she always considered to be her 'primo e grande amore' (p. 12). Although she was born in Argentina, she had never been able to develop a sense of belonging or attachment to the country of her birth and she communicates her feelings of estrangement through recurring metaphors of being out of place.

Oxalà, in which she refers to Italy as 'la Patria lontana', gives evidence of her strong identification with Italy. Garetto states categorically that despite being born in Argentina, 'mi sono sempre sentita straniera' (p. 39) and she repeatedly refers to the

periods she has spent in South America as years of exile (pp. 39, 52). Her frequent visits to Italy are experienced as a temporary release from imprisonment whilst each return to South America is represented as an imposed burden, evoking feelings which she describes as 'la gioia esaltante di ogni partenza, la pena di ogni ritorno' (p. 42). The notion of enforced exile is further underscored by the expressions she uses to describe her displacement as a violent and forceful rupture from the place she considers to be her homeland. Although she was not born or raised in Italy, she refers to 'legami spezzati' and 'affetti perduti' (p. 40). She thus represents Italy as a lost homeland which she has been forced to relinquish.

Garetto's memoirs offer a reflection on displacement as a form of trauma. Her text is steeped in images of alienation in South America and nostalgia for her family home in Italy. This sense of loss becomes a heavy burden at significant moments of family life. She indicates her distress at not being present at the death of her grandmother and her father. When her grandmother dies she writes: 'Dopo poco morì. / Io non c'ero' (p. 4). Similarly, on her father's death: 'Morì mio padre. / Io non c'ero' (p. 26). The repetition of this structure and the positioning of the second sentence on a separate line serve to emphasise the distance between her family in Italy and her own life in South America. The break in the sentence structure underlines the rupture she feels as a result of her imposed dislocation. Her Italian relatives are central to her own sense of belonging in Italy and with their death she feels that a part of her own identity has been taken away. This reinforces her idea that she is losing her grip on Italy and that her connections to the past and to Italy are in danger of being severed. She is forced to come to terms with not only the loss of a close family member but also with her own distance and separation from a place to which she considers her true home. 'Non avveniva un passaggio, ma uno strappo

lacerante provocato dalla lontananza, che acuiva quel terribile senso di non appartenere più a niente, né a nessuno' (p. 58). Her writing thus conveys a sense of how displacement is experienced as a form of trauma.

A series of metaphors of displacement emphasise her feelings of being away from her true home. The sense of being out of place permeates her descriptions of her family pets in Argentina. She relates how her dog once adopted a family of chicks:

> Ebbe il buon senso di non interferire nella loro formazione imponendo la sua caninità. Li lasciava razzolare senza pretendere che bevessero il latte o imparassero ad abbaiare e così, quando furono cresciuti, entrarono senza traumi nei ranghi dei polli. (p. 9)

This is followed by a similar description of the hens:

> Le galline che chiocciavano uova di anatre e alla rivelazione di avere dei figli degeneri li chiamavano disperate dalla riva mentre i piccoli anatroccoli nuotavano beati nello stagno. (p. 13)

These anecdotal descriptions, although amusing, reflect her notion of being born into an alien environment whilst possessing certain inherited characteristics which define her as Italian. The animals do not and cannot change despite the circumstances in which they are raised. These descriptions suggest that she considers her strong attachment to Italy to be something innate which cannot be weakened by living in another country or being amongst people whom she considers to be very different from her. Like the chicks adopted by the dog or the ducks raised by hens, she sees herself as an incongruity in the land of her birth.

The sense of being out of place in South America is contrasted with the feelings she expresses each time she returns to Tuscany. Everything appears to have returned to its proper place and a sense of order and stability is restored to her life:

> Mi sembrava di assistere ad un film che proiettasse all'indietro un lancio di una partita di bowling: la palla che con violenza aveva abbattuto tutti i birilli, tornava nella mano del Dio malefico che l'aveva lanciata e dalla buca i birilli balzavano su ad uno ed uno a riprendere il loro posto. (p. 51)

Although everything is back in place, the predominant image here is one of irrational violence and destruction which, Garetto believes, mirrors her own experience of displacement. It also emphasises her conviction that she is not in control of her own

destiny, rather her life is shown to be in the hands of God, a powerful but malevolent being who has scant regard for her interests. This fatalistic attitude is evident from the title of her memoirs, *Oxalà*, a term of African origin used in the local Creole to mean 'if God wills'.

The locations described in *Oxalà* are predominantly places in Italy or, more specifically, Tuscany and the coastal area around Lucca. Memories of her teenage years in Italy are recreated with affection and nostalgia. Garetto's descriptions of summer vacations in Italy evoke a happy and carefree youth as she relates the long days spent chatting to friends on the beach, listening to gramophone records, horse-riding, roller-skating, sailing and cycling (p. 18). She creates a romanticized depiction of tranquillity in the images of a moonlit beach with the sound of waves lapping the shore, the shadows of the tall pine trees and the soft, warm evening breeze (p. 25). She appeals to all the senses in her fond recollections of the sights, sounds and scents of the Tuscan countryside, with the swish of the broom sweeping the terrace, the call of the swallows, the ringing of church bells and the sound of familiar voices, all of which provide a sharp contrast to the drone of traffic and the polluting air of Sao Paolo (p. 52). She recalls the 'aria d'Italia' (p. 12) and describes the unique scent of the Tuscan village: 'Il profumo delle piante di basilico, misto a quello amarognolo dei gerani che fiorivano rigogliosi sul balconcino del piccolo salotto, invadeva la stanza' (p. 52). The house is infused with the perfume of the herbs and plants, contributing to the sense of harmony between the inside and outside worlds. These are the scents and sounds of nature rather than the invasive noises and suffocating fumes from life in the streets of Brazil.

The sense of attachment that Garetto feels towards Italy is reflected in her descriptions of the surrounding towns and villages. Tuscan towns, built in medieval

times, come to represent stability and permanence. They are composed of 'vecchie case, chiese antiche e nobili palazzi' (p. 4). The Fosso of Barga is described as 'un vastissimo piazzale rettangolare lungo le altissime, imponenti mure cinquecentesche' (p. 8). The 500-year-old walls come to symbolise the secure and stable nature of life in the village, they guard the town against outside influences keeping old traditions and cultures intact and serve as a protection rather than representing enclosure. It is a place where families have lived for generations and buildings have remained unchanged for centuries.

> Le mure ed il Fosso terminano, dal lato apposto alla gradinata, con l'arco chiamato Porto Reale, entrata principale dell'antico paese dominato dall'alto del colle dal Duomo, uno splendido gioiello dell'architettura romanica. (p. 8)

The grandeur of the town's architecture and long history contribute to her feelings of rootedness within its walls. It provides her and the villagers a sense of place in history. As I go on to show, this contrasts significantly with the way in which Ferrante equates fixity with stagnation and with Lorenzini for whom magnificent buildings only serve to underscore her low status in society.

Garetto includes similar descriptions of other Tuscan towns and names the many places she visits: Florence, Lucca, Versilia, Forte dei Marmi, Viareggio and Torre del Lago. She provides the reader with people's names, even those of minor figures such as Ninetta the doughnut seller. This, once again, is in direct opposition to her representation of South America. Although this is where she has spent most of her life and there are many episodes in the text which occur in South America, no person (other than family members) or place is ever mentioned by name. The reader can only deduce that she is referring to places in Argentina and Brazil. Her refusal to name South America suggests that the place itself is not really important; it is simply somewhere away from home, a non-place. Her *terragraphica*, the term Johnson uses to denote a literary home or place from which to write, is clearly Tuscan.

Garetto's depiction of physical buildings further reflects the importance of Tuscany as her perceived home. She shows her affinity to her parents' villa in Versilia and her relatives' house in Garfagnana. On return to her relatives' house in Tuscany she writes:

> Rientravo nello stesso mondo stabile, sicuro e ordinato che ricordavo, fra gente che in tutto quel tempo aveva sempre avuto lo stesso soffitto sulla testa, lo stesso pavimento sotto i piedi ed io di soffitti e pavimenti ne avevo cambiati almeno nove in quindici anni! (p. 50)

Garetto thus links stability and security with a permanent dwelling place: a fixed, permanent abode is necessary if one is to put down roots; it anchors a person to a location. She attributes her lack of attachment to Argentina to the fact that she did not have a fixed roof over her head, instead her family were continually moving between different locations. She therefore did not have the chance to build up a sense of familiarity with her surroundings or to develop a sense of belonging to any one place.

During the Second World War, her grandparents' house in Tuscany functions as a place of refuge for both family members and others in need of shelter: 'l'unico rifugio fu la casa dei nonni in Garfagnana' (pp. 22-23). The home is once more linked with safety and protection. In the same period, her parents' villa in Versilia becomes a melting pot for an eclectic mix of people: '[Fu] un centro di incontri e di scontri, delle idee e dei gusti più disparati e, durante la Guerra, fu un porto di mare dove passarono inglesi, ebrei, tedeschi, americani bianchi e neri, indiani, brasiliani' (p. 16). Unlike Ferrante, who has to travel abroad in order to satisfy her need for contact with other ideas, peoples and cultures, for Garetto the exchange with the outside world occurs within the family home.

When the family sell the villa at the end of the Second World War she likens her suffering to that of losing a friend: 'Per me morì, perchè io l'amavo come si ama una persona cara' (p. 39). Her sense of attachment to the house is emphasised by her

personification of the building as a dear friend. The private house in Italy seems to blend in with its surrounding landscape and becomes an extension of the wider community. As she wanders around the town and countryside she encounters familiar faces which satisfy her desire to 'stare in mezzo a gente conosciuta' (p. 52). There is no apparent division between the interior and exterior worlds as public spaces are described with the familiarity usually reserved for private spaces whilst the family home is open to each and every passer-by.

In Argentina, however, the division between the inside and outside world could not be more distinct. Garetto looks out of her apartment block onto a street heaving with traffic which mirrors her feelings of alienation towards the modern city. 'Una volta in strada, la confusione e i rumori mi entravano a martellate nel cervello' (p. 55). She is overwhelmed by the surrounding tower blocks: 'i grattacieli che in questa città crescono come i funghi dopo la pioggia' (p. 55). The modern city is continually changing shape, it lacks the constancy of the Tuscan town. Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* comments that apartments, unlike houses, have no cellars, thus no roots, and that this contributes to feelings of alienation of modern city dwelling.[38] Garetto represents the modern city as a violent and chaotic place and the outside world becomes a threatening rather than welcoming environment. This time there are no familiar faces to greet her: 'La gente non faceva caso a me. Seduta su una panca, sommersa dal caos del traffico' (p. 55).

She does not belong in this city; it is an overwhelming place in which she becomes almost invisible. Eventually her condition deteriorates into a form of agoraphobia, and she is unable to leave the house or even look out of the window. Her movement is restricted by fear of being trapped in the lift or the fear of a light

[38] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 26.

not working and being left in the dark. This period of illness is also characterised by strange, recurring dreams which once again reflect feelings of being trapped and unable to move whilst trying in vain to reach an elusive home-like place:

> Sognavo di nuotare, ma il mare si mutava di colpo in una sabbia appiccicosa e calda che non mi lasciava avanzare. Una bracciata dopo l'altra, cercavo, con uno sforzo immane di raggiungere qualcosa, ma che cosa? Se fossi riuscita a scoprirlo, sentivo che mi sarei salvata. (p. 55)

> Si alternavano visioni strane: vedevo la mia casa, ma non era in Versilia, era piccolissima, piazzata in bilico su un cocuzzolo di montagna e stonava maledettamente col paesaggio circostante, tentavo di raggiungerla per riportarla al posto giusto e allora si metteva a navigare su un mare in tempesta con le finestre spalancate e tende nere che svolazzavano al vento. (p. 56)

Eventually Garetto thinks that she has discovered a house where she can feel at home, 'una casa a cui affezionarmi, un rifugio che mi dava un senso di sicurezza e di stabilità', again associating security with having a fixed and permanent abode (p. 57). However, this turns out to be just a temporary illusion after a trip to Italy reignites her feelings of nostalgia and prompts her nightmares to return. She likens this effect to that of a monster which, as long as it remains at the bottom of the lake doesn't present a problem, but when it comes to the surface it triggers feelings of fear and unease.

She is fearful of the Brazilian city outside but feels trapped in her apartment, with no other place to go and no choice but to stay where she is. The inside world of her apartment is experienced as a prison rather than a home, reinforcing her sense of exile, whilst the outside world comes to represent emptiness and fear. Interior and exterior spaces, the home and the outside world are all interrelated in the text. The rootedness that Garetto associates with Italy arises from the permanence and stability of the physical buildings which in turn provides her with a sense of place within the extended community. Her lack of stable abode in South America contributes to her inner feelings of insecurity and as a result the outside world is also perceived as a violent and threatening place.

Garetto feels an immediate connection with her second husband, Giorgio, who as an Italian emigrant had undergone similar experiences and is therefore able to empathise with her situation. She portrays herself and her partner as united by their common experiences and bound together in their suffering:

> Siamo ancora e solo dei sopravvissuti alla tempesta che ci ha travolto tanti anni fa e le tavole alle quali ci aggrappiamo sono fradice e corrose e ci offrono un sostegno precario. (p. 1)

> Anche lui, come me [...] era stato preso, sradicato e sbattuto al di là dell'oceano. All'inferno, così senza peccato e senza speranza di remissione. (p. 40)

The expressions used once again underline her perception of the unjust and violent nature of their displacement which she represents as a forceful uprooting from one's natural environment and a condemnation to life in exile, an experience which she likens to spending an eternity in hell. The violence is also reflected in the destructiveness of the storm which leaves only turmoil and chaos in its path. Everything is out of place. They are desperately trying to cling on to their memories and connections with Italy but those links are becoming increasingly tenuous and fragile, emphasising the uncertainty and instability of their lives. After her friends and family move away, the links become increasingly remote and Garetto searches in vain for the slightest association with Italy:

> [Il mare] era quell'unico elemento tangibile che in qualche modo ci univa all'Italia. Chissà che nell'acqua che ci scorreva fra le dita, non ci fosse una cellula che, magari secoli prima, aveva toccato le sponde italiane. (pp. 40-41)

Travel, which is normally associated with freedom, is instead represented in the text as a burden. Although her friends back in Italy envy her frequent journeys between South America and Italy, Garetto feels increasingly weighed down by the experience of her displacement. She writes: 'Le mie ali sono diventate troppo pesanti. Volare sempre stanca!' (p. 62). The debilitating effect of displacement means that she no longer has the strength to escape: 'In fondo anch'io non ho un

altro posto dove andare. E fuori ci sono il vuoto e la paura. E c'è la vita che io non amo più' (p. 62).

The final visit to Italy described in the text reveals a further aspect of displacement in its presentation of the trauma of memory. Garetto is increasingly aware of the passage of time which has caused her memories to become fixed in the past. She comes to realise that the reality she faces is far different from the nostalgic image of Tuscany that she has carried with her since childhood. Yet again, the home is the source of these feelings as it comes to symbolize the changing world: 'Non c'è più neanche la bella, amata casa dei miei zii, c'è il suo fantasma, con tanta gente dentro, sconosciuta, che l'ha divisa in tanti appartamenti' (p. 64). Many of her family members have passed away, the house has been divided into separate apartments and she doesn't even know the people who live there anymore. She has become a stranger in unfamiliar surroundings in a ghost-like town full of empty memories. The wider community, too, has also changed beyond recognition:

> La vita in Italia è troppo impegnativa, la gente troppo indaffarata e indifferente. Niente mi appartiene più e poi capisco che ormai rischierei di arrivare "con una fame da lupo ad un banchetto già bell'e apparecchiato". (p. 64)

The intertextual reference to Pirandello's *Enrico IV* highlights the temporal aspect of displacement. Garetto senses that she belongs to a different time as well as a different place. Her sense of belonging to the past leaves her estranged from the present.

Garetto therefore feels that she is no longer part of the town or its community and is suddenly forced to come to terms with the fact that the place which she has always considered to be her home and homeland no longer belongs to her. She likens her memories of Italy to that of a photograph taken many years before. The predominant image of carefree youth and summertime in Versilia now becomes transformed into a wintry landscape, symbolic of death and decay: 'Un panorama invernale, una bella cartolina illustrata: "Inverno in Garfagnana" e tale doveva in futuro rimanere per me'

(p. 60). She comes to realise that home has remained frozen in her mind and the image she has constructed is no longer authentic. She recognises that she must let go of this image in order to come to terms with her continuing life in Brazil: 'Basta con i ricordi assillanti! Basta con le fotografie ingiallite coi fantasmi ammuffiti' (p. 60).

The final section of her autobiography returns to the opening scene in which Giorgio is driving her towards an unnamed destination. As they sit in silence, Garetto is mentally constructing her story which she will record later that evening. Faced with the realisation that home is constantly changing and always inauthentic, Garetto comes to terms with her homelessness through the act of writing.

CARLINA LORENZINI, *IL RITORNO*

Carlina Lorenzini was born in Piombino, near Livorno, in 1924. Shortly after her birth her family emigrated from Italy to Buenos Aires, returning in 1933, when Lorenzini was just nine years old. Her memoirs represent her experiences and emotions on return to Italy after her early childhood spent in Argentina. The focus of her account is clearly indicated by her choice of title, *Il ritorno* [The Return], which itself is not without irony. Return, for Lorenzini, does not have the resonance of a homecoming, as the only 'home' she had even known had been in Argentina. She had been raised in Buenos Aires and had few, if any, memories of Italy before her family emigrated. She thus calls into question the concept of the journey to Italy as being a return to her homeland or Patria. As the ship sails towards Italy she asks 'Quale Patria?' (p. 3). For Lorenzini, repatriation is not a return journey to a familiar setting but a voyage into the unknown.

Wandering around the ship en route to Italy, Carlina is confronted with a poster of Mussolini. She takes an instant dislike to the image and makes an offensive hand gesture at the photograph for which she is reprimanded by her mother who fears this

act would lead to reprisals against the family (pp. 6, 7). The imposing, authoritative figure of Mussolini appears intimidating to the young child. Mussolini comes to represent the Italy to which she is returning, a place that she sees as hostile and threatening. Her negative impression is reaffirmed when she arrives at the railway station at Piombino which, she claims, is unlike anything she has seen in Argentina. Her initial reaction is one of rejection: 'Questa è una stazione? ... Che brutta, non voglio entrare' (p. 8).

Lorenzini's initial inability to view Italy as her homeland is closely related to her family's economic situation and status in Italian society. Italy in 1933 is characterised by economic depression and the constraints of Fascism which combine to prevent the family returning to Argentina:

> [M]a in Italia erano anni oscuri: il fascismo imperava; il Duce Benito Mussolini quel tetro Duce alla cui foto aveva fatto il gesto irriverente delle corna sulla nave, proprio lui fece emanare una legge con cui si chiudevano le frontiere per l'estero, così che noi rimanemmo bloccati in Italia. (p. 12)

As a result of the new laws passed by the Fascist state, the family have to prolong their stay in Italy. Her father's grocery shop is forced to close owing to the economic crisis and his attempts to find alternative employment are hampered by his refusal to enrol in the Fascist party. The family also have difficulties finding suitable accommodation (p. 11). Lorenzini describes her mother as being 'capovolta' on return to Italy. Her world, along with the life of her family, had been turned upside down by the experience of displacement (p. 10). Lorenzini's first experiences in Italy are therefore characterised by uncertainty and instability, and her circumstances are not conducive to her developing a sense of belonging to the land of her birth.

In addition to the problems faced by her family, Carlina is also made to feel an outsider in school. Although Italian was her mother tongue, she had attended a bilingual school in Argentina where she had been taught Spanish. However, her

mother tongue, especially her written Italian, had been affected by the interference of Spanish, so that she spelt Italian words with Spanish phonetics, for example *acua* and *chenere* rather than *acqua* and *cenere* (p. 11). Her standard of Italian was judged insufficient and as a result she was placed in a class a year below that of her peers which becomes a source of humiliation and frustration for the young child. It is also at school that she becomes increasingly aware of the hierarchical nature of Italian society, thus compounding her feelings of alienation: 'sentivo quindi una notevole diversità tra quel mondo ed il mio' (p. 15). Her classmates have their own books, governesses and servants, they play tennis in their free time and take their holidays in the mountains. Their conversations revolve around music and cinema, but Carlina cannot join in as her family do not own a radio and cannot afford to take her to the cinema (p. 17). She feels out of place with children of a different age group and different social background, her own language is judged as lacking and she is unable to participate in the conversations and activities of her schoolmates. She claims: 'mi sentivo esclusa' and this sense of exclusion expresses itself in her increasingly introverted character (p. 17).

Lorenzini's inability to feel 'at home' in Italy is linked to her experience of the family's physical home which, in turn, is related to her family's economic circumstances. Her representation of physical dwelling places indicates her feelings of insecurity. The villa of the local Baron is represented as a 'bella solida villa', and 'una villa stupenda sulla scogliera' (p. 16). This imposing building is solid and stable, impervious to change and anchors the wealthy landowner in his privileged position in society. The villa is set away from the other houses, reached by a long path and set high on the cliff. The physical distance of the villa from the other houses underscores the social distance between the aristocracy and working classes. In

contrast, Lorenzini's family house is described in rather unfavourable terms as an old dilapidated building which no longer exists. It is described as 'un po' dimessa', 'una vecchia villa a due piani che attualmente non esiste più' (p. 14). This building is seen as a temporary dwelling rather than a permanent and stable home. Her representation of the houses reflects her own feelings of insecurity regarding class status:

> Cominciai allora a sentire certe differenze di classe: l'aristocrazia, la borghesia, i contadini lavoravano per loro, i padroni, che rispettavano per ancestrale devozione o forse per rassegnazione o perchè – dati i tempi – non avevano mai pensato ad una situazione diversa. (p. 16)

The class awareness that Lorenzini feels so keenly is embodied in the two houses. Her ability to interpret the private space of her own dwelling place as a secure home is limited by wider issues of class and socio-economics. Blunt and Rose link the distinction between public and private space (and women's association with the private) with the emergence of middle classes in nineteenth-century Europe and North America: 'The suburban villa was intended to be the site of private domesticity triumphant, inscribing in bricks and mortar the values of middle-class familial order.'[39] For migrants and returning migrants, the physical house appears as a mark of the success or failure of their journey. For Lorenzini, it is class difference which overrides other concerns and prevents her family house from becoming home. She therefore discloses an awareness that home is also a site within interconnecting discourses of travel.

There is, however, a more sinister aspect to Lorenzini's representation of the home. She shows how the private nature of interior spaces serves to cover over more sinister events, making them invisible to the outside world. Lorenzini relates two incidents of rape, both of which occur in enclosed spaces. The first account is that of her friend Publia who is taken to the school building by the Partisans where she is

[39] Blunt and Rose, pp. 3-4.

sexually assaulted. Later, Lorenzini herself is raped in her own family home by her boyfriend who knew that he would find her alone at certain times of the day: 'Quel giorno mi raccomandai più e più volte che se ne andasse: il campanello continuava a suonare ... Quando mi lasciò, fui presa dalla nausea, dal vomito, dalla disperazione' (p. 23). Lorenzini's silence regarding the assault, hidden within the ellipsis, reflects the concealed nature of the crime. The reader is not privy to the events which occur inside the house. The only actions recorded are those of the boyfriend ringing the doorbell and leaving afterwards, precisely the events that would be visible to the outside world. It is the very private nature of domestic interior space that provides the necessary circumstances for the assault. Lorenzini thus shows that home is not always a safe haven but can also be a site of danger and violence. Home, as for many of Pariani's protagonists, becomes a site of rape, physical violence and verbal abuse. The World Heath Organization's World Report on Violence and Heath notes:

> It is the very 'private' nature of this violence which often makes it invisible – either literally, since it happens behind closed doors, or effectively, since legal systems and cultural norms too often treat it not as a crime, but as a family matter, or a normal part of life.[40]

This is precisely what happens to Lorenzini as she is attacked behind closed doors, becomes pregnant and then is forced by her family and local customs to marry her rapist against her will. Society thus compounds the crime and the perpetrator is left unpunished. Lorenzini recognises that she is part of a society whose laws and cultural norms expect a woman to accept difficult situations and bear them with dignity: 'A quel tempo era convalidata l'idea che la donna dovesse subire ed accettare ogni situazione' (p. 25). She is forced into an unhappy marriage, characterised by violent arguments and infidelity on the part of her husband. Home therefore can be a place where sinister events can be hidden from the rest of society

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[40] 'Gender, Women and Health: Gender-Based Violence', *World Health Organization:* <http://www.who.int/gender/violence/en/> [accessed 8 May 2007]

and where crimes against women are exacerbated by the family and local traditions. The home becomes a hazardous place rather than a secure place of refuge.

Lorenzini's return to Italy is experienced as an imposed exile from the only homeland she had ever known. Her initial feelings on arrival in Italy are ones of repulsion and she is made to feel an outsider both from her friends in school and in the wider community. The instability of her family situation and their financial circumstances limit the development of a sense of belonging within an Italian community. Her notion of home is that of a temporary dwelling place, linked to the family's low status in society. She further shows how private space can be a site where violence and abuse are hidden away from the rest of society. Lorenzini has no control over all the major decisions in her life. Events are imposed on her: her original departure to Argentina, the return to Italy, her schooling, her first sexual experience and subsequent marriage. Her lack of control over such events compound her initial feelings of alienation and prevent her birth-land from becoming a homeland.

PIA FERRANTE, *QUANDO LE OMBRE SI ALLUNGANO*

Pia Ferrante was born in 1920 in Venice. Her autobiography *Quando le ombre si allungano*, covers the period from 1920 to 1998 and describes her many journeys and periods spent abroad. A compulsive traveller and writer, she includes details of several journeys to South America, her travels in Iran in 1975, a year spent working for La Federazione Democratica Internazionale Femminile in East Berlin in 1959, and a period teaching Italian and history in Eritrea from 1968-69. Ferrante was a member of the feminist organisation *Unione Donne Italiane* and wrote numerous articles on feminist issues. She has also published a number of fictional and semi-

autobiographical works based on her travels including *L'onda anomala* (1999) set in Chile and Panama, and *Di là dal muro* (1976) set in East Berlin.

The introductory section of Ferrante's account concludes with the question 'perchè vorrei sempre trovarmi "altrove"?' (p. 1). Ferrante fears that she will never be able to provide the answer to her question which presents itself frequently throughout the text: 'In qualunque luogo io sia provo il desiderio di trovarmi "altrove"' (p. 30), and 'mi chiedo perchè io vorrei sempre essere "altrove" rispetto a dove mi trovo' (p. 61). Although Ferrante fears she will never know the answer to this question, a possible explanation can be found from an analysis of her ideas of home contained within her autobiography. This will show how the meaning of home and what staying at home represents for Ferrante are central to understanding her constant need to be elsewhere. Ferrante's feelings of displacement are more an abstract need to be constantly on the move, not at home or away but somewhere else. The problem faced by the travelling self, according to Trinh T. Minh-ha, is having to negotiate 'between a here, a there and an elsewhere'.[41]

The account begins with a description of two palm trees that her father planted for his two children: 'Quando nacqui mio padre pose in un vaso di terracotta una piccola pianta di palma; ne piantò un'altra, tre anni dopo, alla nascita di mio fratello' (p. 1). The palm tree becomes an important symbol of identity within the text. Ferrante's decision to use the image of the palm tree in the opening section of her autobiography indicates that this tree is of major significance in her life. The palm tree is clearly linked with her own development as she continues: 'La crescita delle palme accompagnò la nostra' (p. 1). Later, when the family moved from the city of Venice to the Lido, the trees were transferred from the terracotta pot and replanted in

[41] Minh-ha, p. 9.

the garden of their new house. However, her brother's palm tree withered and died shortly after his own premature death. As a result of this coincidence, Ferrante comes to believe that her own destiny and that of the palm tree were closely intertwined: 'Ora penso che anche la mia palma accompagni la mia vita e che anch'essa, non so come, non so perchè, morrà assieme a me' (p. 28). The following description of the tree can therefore be read as a metaphor for her own feelings of home: 'Quand'era piccina, è stata piantata troppo in prossimità della parete della casa, forse per proteggerla ma senza prevederne lo sviluppo' (p. 28). This suggests that whilst recognising the benefits of home as a place of shelter and the good intentions of her parents in protecting her from the outside world, she nevertheless feels that remaining close to home stifles her personal growth and that in order to develop she needs to move away from home. This explains both her expressed desire to be elsewhere, whilst at the same time her willingness to return to her family home and the fond memories of childhood that it represents: 'Penso sempre di più, quando sono in viaggio, con tenerezza, al ritorno perché quando ritorno ritrovo l'infanzia' (p. 42).

Ferrante's secure home life changes suddenly in 1935 when her father dies of pneumonia at only forty-five years of age, an event which forces her into the realities of the adult world. She searches amongst his old letters in the attic where she uncovers hidden family scandals including her aunt's affair and her grandfather's suicide. The discovery of these family secrets prompts her to question the things her parents had told her as a child. The safe but insular world of the child is disrupted and childhood certainties and beliefs are called into question. As an adult she seeks answers and knowledge outside the home environment. Ferrante's journeys all represent a search for knowledge, of other cultures, alternative lifestyles and philosophies. Her interest in socialism and feminism take her to East Berlin and she

goes to Iran to explore the Bahà'ì religion. She acknowledges that these interests were linked to her father's commitment to socialism and represent a search for justice in society (p. 30). Her experience of home, therefore, becomes a starting point for her search for knowledge in the outside world.

Ferrante's first experiences of travel are represented as a liberation from her enclosed and insular world which she describes as 'il mondo sognato che mi si apriva davanti' (p. 34). Travel also becomes a way to move on emotionally and psychologically when a place becomes linked in her mind with pain or suffering: 'Quando soffro troppo in un luogo per una morte o una separazione sento la necessità di allontanarmene' (p. 18). When her marriage fails she goes to Barcelona and Andalusia as, she writes, 'sentivo il bisogno di cambiare orizzonte' (p. 34). Travel therefore represents a widening of horizons, the opening up of a world of opportunities and a means of leaving behind past events and moving forward. Even death is described as '[il] gran viaggio finale' (p. 1). It is depicted, not in terms of fear, but as simply another opportunity to explore an unknown space.

An analysis of Ferrante's concept of staying in one place sheds further light on her desire to be somewhere else. In her account Ferrante expresses her dislike for fixed and unchanging situations and links fixed abodes with stagnation whilst change and movement represent progression. As a child she writes that she didn't want to be a teacher because 'mi ripugnava: una vita così angusta, sempre uguale, anche se utile' (p. 7). She judges the value of future career opportunities based on their creative value and the possibilities they present for travel rather than their pure economic advantage. She favours 'tutti quelli che dal loro lavoro erano portati in giro per il mondo e che potevano arricchire interiormente se stessi conoscendo paesi e popoli' (p. 7). The state of staying at home and the lack of movement that this

implies places limits on knowledge and is therefore linked to a lack of progression. On the other hand, travel enables contact with the outside world and, according to Ferrante, enriches the subject.

The above view is also evident from Ferrante's reaction to the Italian communities that she encounters in Uruguay and Eritrea. In Uruguay she is welcomed into an Italian community but comments on the ambivalence of their relationship with their adopted country and their homeland. Although they seem happy with their situation in Uruguay, they still express feelings of nostalgia for the home they have left behind in Italy. As one man says: 'Sto bene qui ma ogni notte sogno di camminare a piedi scalzi, bambino, per i viottoli polverosi del mio paesino in Basilicata' (p. 59). However, Ferrante points out that their ideas of Italy remain fixed in their memory. The Italy that they remember and the Italy of the present day appear to be two entirely different entities: 'Mi sembra di vivere in una piccola Italia del sud di cinquant'anni fa; non sanno e non capiscono molto di quella attuale' (p. 61). Ferrante shows that by staying in Uruguay, their impressions of Italy have remained static, whilst their lives and habits have not progressed with time. 'Molti hanno mantenuto la lingua, il dialetto, la mentalità, le usanze di paesi che non vedono da trenta, quarant'anni' (p. 61).

A similar description is given of the Italian community of Asmara in Eritrea where Ferrante taught Italian and history from 1968-69. She comments on the problems in defining national identity and homeland for people who had been born in Eritrea or had lived there for many years. Although many considered Eritrea to be their home, it is a place where they were not welcome, yet they had no understanding of post-war Italy. Ferrante feels uncomfortable when she finds herself face to face

with old colonial attitudes which, she claims, are prevalent within the Italian community:

> Gli italiani di Asmara sono seimila, circa; in genere rimpiangono il tempo nel quale erano "padroni", fra il 1935 e il 1942, quando ammontavano a novantamila; disprezzano i nativi come il padrone disprezza il servo che non può sedersi alla sua mensa: molto, ora, vorrebbero andarsene da questa terra che avvertono sempre più ostile ma sono qui da trent'anni e sentono estraneo anche il paese d'origine, in Italia, ragionano come ai tempi di "faccetta nera" e non comprendono la democrazia, i partiti, i giochi della politica; vi sono, poi, coloro che sono nati qui, figli o nipoti degli italiani sbarcati a Massawa alla fine dello scorso secolo; per loro l'Eritrea è la patria ma una patria che ormai li respinge. (p. 82)

> Nel ristorante ci sono altri italiani residenti qui, vengono a salutarci e a brindare con noi ma la conversazione mi mette a disagio, parlano come se fossimo nel 1935, esaltano ancora il duce, c'è in loro il rimpianto di quando si sentivano padroni, in questa terra. (p. 75)

These people regret that they are no longer masters of the country and its population appear trapped in a permanent state of nostalgia for a bygone age. Their notion of Eritrea and their memories of Italy are fixed in an unchanging past. Ferrante again demonstrates how staying in one place has meant a lack of personal, political and intellectual progression for these settlers.

The need to be elsewhere is linked in the text with the equally pressing need to write about one's experiences.

> Importante è stata la scrittura, il bisogno di esprimere con le parole scritte ciò che mi entusiasmava o mi faceva soffrire, procurandomi un senso di liberazione; importantissimi sono stati i viaggi perché in qualunque luogo io sia provo il desiderio di trovarmi 'altrove'. (p. 30)

Ferrante associates writing with travel for the sense of liberation it provides: writing and travel both offer a means of making sense of one's experiences. She writes of the 'urgenza di scrivere' and describes it as 'un atto liberatorio egoistico' (p. 90). Writing becomes a place in which she finds freedom of expression as she is able to unburden herself in her personal diaries and memoirs. For Ferrante, autobiography becomes an abode in which she takes refuge.[42]

Ferrante does not present a singular notion of home in her text. For her, home can be simultaneously a place of confinement from which she needs to escape and a

[42] Minh-ha, p. 10.

secure place to which she can always return. Staying at home or remaining too long in one fixed place is linked to isolation and stagnation. Ferrante's expressed need to be elsewhere is therefore related to her need for change and a desire for new experiences and knowledge. Home is represented as the point of origin and the point of return but the place she chooses to inhabit is the outside world.

CONCLUSION: THE TRAUMA OF HOMELESSNESS

The texts I have discussed are only a small sample from a wide body of work, yet they offer a glimpse at ways in which Italian women have represented their experience of displacement and their relationship to home. Home assumes different meanings in their writings, reaffirming Zygmunt Bauman and Avtar Brah's definitions of home as a mixture of safety and terror, shelter and prison. Home, as revealed in these texts, can be a site of violence, oppression and poverty or it may represent a site of nostalgia, a place of fixity in an ever-changing world. Although Pariani's protagonists, Garetto, Lorenzini and Ferrante offer different experiences of travel and migration, in each case they represent cases of alienation and estrangement from home. If, as Morley and Robins argue, places are no longer the firm supports of our identities, then these writings give some indication as to the impact that the severance of place from identity may have on subjectivity. The loss of home is represented in the texts as a trauma that involves a loss of part of the self. The full alienating effect of displacement on subjectivity is revealed through frequent metaphors of being out of place or being uprooted from home. Such images convey the turmoil of migration and portray displacement as a form of violence acted out upon identity. In the case of Garetto, nostalgia for a former home even has serious physical manifestations. Moreover, in their expressions of being out of time as well as out of place, the writers draw attention to the temporal as well as spatial nature of

displacement. Like Socorro López's backward clock they are engaged in a futile attempt to 'costringere il tempo a tornare sui suoi passi', which seems to prevent them from moving forward, from forging new allegiances to place and fashioning alternative identities.[43] Instead, for these women, writing becomes a form of therapy, a way of working through traumatic experiences and coping with the experience of being away from home. In the absence of a place to call home, writing becomes their abode.

[43] Pariani, *Quando Dio ballava il tango*, p. 249.

CHAPTER 3

Cultural Competencies and the Performance of Cultural Identity in Bamboo Hirst's *Blu Cina.*

> Avevo raccolto una piccola pianta sradicata. L'avevo trapiantata in un posto triste. Tra i sassi, ma aveva attecchito lo stesso. Le sue radici danneggiate dal trapianto erano ancora fragili perché appena nate. Avevo creato intorno a lei una muraglia, là nessuno poteva calpestarla. Era riparata dalle intemperie.
>
> Stava già spuntando una foglia, trasparente, delicata. Non aveva ancora preso colore, era pallida. Aveva bisogno di sole, di luce, di caldo.
>
> Forse un giorno fiorirà. Ci vorrà ancora tempo.[1]

INTRODUCTION: A SENSE OF UPROOTEDNESS

The image of a plant and its roots is a recurring metaphor in many writings on travel and migration: rootedness, on the one hand, indicates fixity and belonging to a place, whilst uprootedness denotes displacement and the feelings of alienation in a foreign environment. Erminia Dell'Oro describes her family and other early colonists as having deep roots in Eritrea in order to emphasize their long standing in the colonial community.[2] As discussed in the previous chapter, Pia Ferrante uses descriptions of a palm tree and the development of its roots to illustrate her own problematic relationship with home.[3] Fabrizia Ramondino in *In viaggio* refers to the wandering tendencies of a young Neapolitan as an inability to put down roots: 'Le radici della sua pianta erano quelle di una pianta erratica, non parassita.'[4] In the opening quotation, however, the question of roots takes a more problematic turn to suggest a more radical experience of displacement. Displacement suggests the removal of a thing from its place; a displaced

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[1] Bamboo Hirst, *Inchiostro di Cina* (Milan: Tartaruga, 1987), pp. 73-4.
[2] Dell'Oro, *Asmara addio*, p. 90.
[3] Ferrante, *Quando le ombre si allungano*, p. 28.
[4] Ramondino, *In viaggio*, p. 17.

person is someone removed from his or her home: 'Each metaphor of displacement [exile, diaspora, tourism], includes referentially a concept of placement, dwelling, location or position.'[5] Displacement thus contains within it the notion of a place of origin, a place called home, to which the subject feels s/he belongs and which impacts upon the development of subjectivity.[6] Here, in the above metaphor of displacement, the roots of the plant have been damaged by movement between places, but the damage is accentuated by the fact that these roots were not fully developed prior to the transition, suggesting that the subject has not developed a clear sense of home as an original place of belonging.

The quotation then does not refer to the experience of an individual such as Dell'Oro whose roots and home remain that of the Italian community of Asmara in spite of the move from colony to metropole. Nor does it reflect the experience of an Italian migrant in South America such as Maria Antoinetta Sartoris Garetto who, although born in Argentina, considers herself culturally rooted in her ancestral home of Tuscany. Even Pia Ferrante, despite her frequent travels, has a clear notion of home as a place of origin and return. These women have varied experiences of travel and migration, yet their sense of Italian cultural identity remains intact. In contrast to these experiences, the above quotation represents a subjectivity which, at the time, has only a tenuous attachment to place. The circumstances of early life have impacted severely on the development of cultural allegiances and, as a result, she does not consider herself

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[5] Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 143.

[6] On 'home' as a desired or imposed identity see Jonathan Rutherford, 'A Place Called Home: Identity and the Cultural Politics of Difference', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 9-27. See also Minh-ha, pp. 9-26; and Martin & Mohanty, pp. 191-212.

securely rooted in any one place. Yet despite these fragile beginnings, the metaphor also contains the notion that cultural belonging or rootedness to place is something that can be constructed over the course of time.

BAMBOO HIRST, *BLU CINA*

The author under discussion in this chapter, Bamboo Hirst, writes about Italy and China and her texts reflect, to a degree, the trauma of displacement and its impact on subjectivity. Her writings address various types of travel, from migration to tourism, and they imaginatively exploit all the resources of travel-writing, so it is perhaps not surprising that they are beginning to attract attention in Italy and beyond. Hirst is discussed in Armando Gnisci's recent anthology of Italian migrant writers, while Fabrizia Ramondino reviewed her most recent work, *Blu Cina* (2005), for *L'Espresso*, drawing parallels between Hirst's family and her own. An English translation of *Blu Cina* is scheduled for publication in March 2008.[7]

Bamboo Hirst's name alone is intriguing: her first name suggests a link with China but is clearly anglicised, the surname also appears English and yet her texts are written in Italian. Her name defies the reader's desire to situate the writer within a recognisable cultural context and literary tradition and points to the sense of cultural hybridity of the writer which is at the centre of her texts. Hirst was, in fact, born in 1940 in Hangzhou, China to a Chinese mother and Italian father; she was raised in French Catholic missions in Shanghai and Ningbo and then sent to Italy at the age of thirteen where she later

[7] See Gnisci, *Nuovo planetario italiano*, pp. 329-36. Fabrizia Ramondino, 'Bamboo dagli occhi a mandorla', *L'Espresso*, 25 (2005), p. 121. An English version of *Blu Cina* translated by Sue Rose is to be published by Loki Books, London.

married an Englishman living in Genoa.[8] She has lived in both Milan and London, working in the fashion industry. Although christened Rose Marie, as an adult she changed her name to Bamboo, which as this chapter will demonstrate represented an important step in the construction of personal identity and agency.

Hirst's most recent text, *Blu Cina*, was published in 2005, though the book is really a collected and revised version of four of her previous texts, *Passaggio a Shanghai* (1991), *Inchiostro di Cina* (1987), *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore* (1989) and *Cartoline da Pechino: Emozioni e colori cinesi* (1993).[9] Divided into three sections, *Blu Cina* is structured around a cyclical journey, from the birth of the authorial protagonist in Shanghai, the journey to Italy and return to China over thirty years later. The cyclical nature of the journey also foregrounds the intimate links between memory and travel. The return to China is a journey into memory which reveals how places are constructed in the imagination from afar and how perceptions of place can be distorted when viewed through the lens of childhood memories.

The first section offers an account virtually equivalent to that of *Passaggio a Shanghai*, although the narrative voice shifts from third to first person. This section traces Hirst's genealogy through five generations from the birth of her maternal great-great-grandfather in 1840. This sets the scene for a rather melodramatic love story between Hirst's mother, Baia Verde, and an Italian government official, referred to only

[8] The transcriptions of Chinese names and places used throughout this chapter are those used by Hirst in *Blu Cina* with the exception of Beijing (Pechino) and Nanjing (Nanchino) for which I have reverted to widely recognised English forms.

[9] *Blu Cina* (Casale Monferrato, AL: Piemme, 2005), *Passaggio a Shanghai* (Milan: Mondadori, 1991), *Inchiostro di Cina* (Milan: La Tartaruga, 1987), *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore: Viaggio attraverso la Cina* (Milan: Mondadori, 1989), *Cartoline da Pechino: emozioni e colori cinesi* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1993). Hirst is also the author of a women's history of China, *Figlie della Cina: Dove nascere donna può ancora essere una maledizione* (Casale Monferrato, AL: Piemme 1999), and *Il riso non cresce sugli alberi* (Milan: La Tartaruga, 1998), a book on Chinese food including menus, recipes, food-related anecdotes and proverbs.

as 'Il Veneziano', who worked for the foreign ministry in the Italian concession in Tianjin and the international concession in Shanghai.[10] The complicated saga of their relationship parallels Italy's changing alliances during the Second World War and the nature of its wartime and post-war relations with China and Japan. The plot is also reminiscent of the Puccini opera, *Madama Butterfly*, which is perhaps no coincidence as Baia Verde had trained as an opera singer. The couple pursue their relationship despite disapproval from the Venetian's family and pressure of government colleagues including the foreign minister, Galeazzo Ciano, a former Italian Consul in Shanghai. As the racial laws of 1938 prohibited the couple from marrying under Italian law, their marriage was celebrated secretly in a traditional Chinese ceremony. For the Venetian, any overt declaration of their nuptials would have meant sacrificing his career, loss of social status and subsequent rejection by his family. Baia Verde later gives birth to a daughter, Rose Marie who, as the war with Japan intensifies, is placed into the protective care of a French Catholic mission in Shanghai. [11] In 1943, following the Allied armistice

[10] On 7 September 1901 Italy obtained a concession of around 46 hectares in the Hebei district of Tianjin, It was occupied by Japan on 10 September 1943 and formally ceded back to China on 10 February 1947 by post-war Italy. Piero Corradini gives a concise historical overview of Italy's relationship with China from the trade agreement of 26 October 1866 to the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 in 'Italia e Cina: dalle prime relazioni consolari al trattato di pace del 1947', *Mondo Cinese*, 76 (1991) 7-47. Maurizio Marinelli in 'Self-portrait in a convex mirror: Colonial Italy Reflects on Tianjin, 1901-1947', *Transtextes – Transcultures* (forthcoming, 2007) discusses Italian re-presentations of the concession and argues that these positive images of the Italian presence in China fostered the notion of a benign colonialism.

[11] Ann Laura Stoler in *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), argues that the control of sexual relations, marriage and reproduction was at the core of imperial politics and was critical in constructing and maintaining racial categories. Métis children disrupted notions of distinct racial categories and blurred the boundaries of national belonging, thus impinging on the power relations of colonial society. In her study of Dutch colonies of Indonesia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Stoler shows how cultural competencies rather than somatic features were often the criteria by which racial membership was assigned (pp. 17, 99, 100). Her study, however, refers mainly to legal rights and recognition rather than how a person was viewed by the local community. Hirst, on the other hand, does not discuss her legal rights to citizenship; her focus is on her own psychological development and the attitudes of others towards her. Nevertheless, her ability to function within a community is shown to be dependent on the development of cultural competencies and an ability to switch between diverse cultural codes.

with Italy, 'Il Veneziano' is interned in a Japanese prisoner of war camp as a consequence of his close relationship with Galeazzo Ciano who, by voting against Mussolini at the Fascist Grand Council, was now considered a traitor. The Italian is released two years later, but at the end of the war he is again threatened with arrest, this time accused of having connections with Wang Chin Wei, the head of the Japanese puppet state based in Nanjing. Although he denied these allegations, 'il Veneziano' reluctantly boarded a ship for Italy, leaving behind Baia Verde and their young daughter, Rose Marie. The colonial love story is akin to that of the interracial romance genre described by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes*, although Baia Verde's fate is unclear: 'Whether love turns out to be requited or not, whether the colonized lover is female or male, outcomes seem to be roughly the same: the lovers are separated, the European is reabsorbed by Europe, and the non-European dies an early death.'[12] The obstacles the couple face further demonstrate the extent to which private lives are determined by public histories.

The second section of *Blu Cina*, which coincides with *Inchiostro di Cina*, relates the child's first encounter with Italy. Rose Marie arrives in Naples at the age of fourteen, after having left China in order to escape an arranged marriage to the benefactor of the mission in Ningbo, a marriage that had been agreed upon by her mother. She had been promised that a relative would meet her at the port, but when no one arrives, Rose Marie is sent to another Catholic institution, this time in Acqui Terme, Piedmont. Her only meeting with her father in Italy occurs three years later; a strained encounter during which Rose Marie remains silent. The narrative of this second section fluctuates between

[12] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 97.

life in Italy and memories of early childhood in China. It explains the difficulties the protagonist faces in adjusting to Italian culture, her development into adulthood, her marriage, the birth of her daughter Nicole, her career in the fashion industry and journeys to Japan, New York and London.

The third section of *Blu Cina* combines *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore* and *Cartoline da Pechino: Emozioni e colori cinesi*. Hirst's personal journey comes full circle as she returns to China for the first time as an adult in order to 'esorcizzare il passato' (p. 379).[13] The tourist itinerary takes her to Beijing, Xian, Chengdu, Shanghai, Nanjing, Ningbo, Hangzhou, Guilin and Hong Kong. The return journey involves an attempt to reconstruct the past from fragments of memory as Hirst retraces her steps around the former Convent school and Cathedral in Shanghai where she had spent her early childhood. However, the modern city, seen now from an adult perspective, becomes disorientating and the contrast between memory and reality is unsettling.[14] She comes to realise that the Shanghai of childhood exists only as a utopian space in her imagination.

Hirst's texts, as can be deduced from this brief summary, abound in references to Italy and China's past. *Blu Cina*, especially the first section, covers many significant

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[13] Unless otherwise indicated, the page numbers cited in the main text are references to *Blu Cina*.

[14] The rapid modernisation of the city is a common theme in textual representations of journeys to China. In *La via della Cina: Una testimonianza tra memoria e cronaca* (Milan: Sperling and Kupfer, 1999), the city of Beijing has a similar impact on Renata Pisu when she returns there in 1986 and 1991 after having studied at University of Beida from 1957-1961. She describes the city as dominated by modern skyscrapers and shopping malls. She laments the pace of the city's transformation which, she claims, prevents her from feeling any sense of connection to the place: '[N]iente mi lega più a questo paese, sono tornata per la cerimonia degli addii. Addio a questa Pechino che si sta cancellando, giorno dopo giorno si dissolvono le sue forme antiche' (p. 168). Angela Terzani Staude's account of three years in China, *Giorni Cinesi* (Milan: TEA, 1996), likewise documents the destruction of certain areas of Beijing, although Staude suggests that the Chinese preference for modern architecture is based on a desire to forget past traumas and therefore it is often only the foreign visitor who bemoans the destruction of these old buildings (pp. 26-27).

events in recent Chinese history including the Boxer uprising, the presence of European imperial powers in China, the Japanese invasion, the First and Second World Wars, the rise of Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution. It also comments on the involvement of Hirst's father with Italian Fascism and provides a valuable insight into the colonial lifestyle in the foreign concessions. However, the text's primary focus is an intense family history, the story of a family torn apart by war, prejudice and cultural differences, and the impact this has on the child's sense of cultural identity and belonging. The theme that predominates the second section is that of estrangement, feelings of difference and being out of place. The adjective 'estranea' is the one most frequently used to describe Hirst's sense of alienation: 'Mi ero sentita qualche volta estranea' (p. 224), 'mi sentivo estranea' (p. 225), 'una estraneità che mi avrebbe accompagnata a lungo' (p. 291). This feeling of estrangement occurs both in China and in Italy and seems to stem from the circumstances of her birth and upbringing.

The feelings that Hirst documents in part derive from her awareness both as a child and as an adult of having parents who come from different racial and cultural backgrounds. She does not, however, depict her sense of estrangement as being an inevitable consequence of her biracial identity. Rather, it is the result of her specific experience of living outside a traditional family setting, having only a very distant relationship with her parents and growing up in an intermediate space (a French Catholic mission) that was neither Chinese nor Italian.[15] The experience of moving between two

[15] Whilst recognising the arbitrary and socially constructed nature of racial categories, the term biracial is used in this chapter to describe a person whose parents come from what are commonly regarded as two distinct groups in terms of geographical distance, somatic features and cultural diversity. See Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in *'Race', Culture and Difference*, ed. by James Donald and Ali Rattansi (London: Sage, 1992), pp. 252-59; and Jayne. O Ifekwunigwe, 'Introduction', in *'Mixed Race' Studies: A Reader*, ed. by Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-36.

very diverse cultures, but not feeling 'at home' in either of them, results in a heightened awareness of the signifying practices that make up identity and Hirst's texts foreground a narrative consciousness with a highly developed sense of the performative nature of cultural identity.

The concept of performativity is particularly useful as a key to unlocking Bamboo Hirst's process of identity construction. In his article 'Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative', Jonathan Culler provides a succinct history of the development of the concept and its use by linguists, literary theorists and philosophers. [16] He identifies John L. Austin's theory of speech acts as laying the basis for these various theories. Austin developed the term performative to distinguish between constative utterances that describe an outside state of affairs and those utterances that perform the action to which they refer. [17] Performative utterances are those that do not simply describe an external reality but play a part in the construction of that reality. In other words, they transform a situation or bring something into being. Austin insists, however, that a successful or felicitous outcome of a performative act is dependent on the circumstances in which it is uttered and the social conventions in operation at a given time. The distinction between constative and performative utterances is eventually discarded in his speech act theory which considers the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects as part of every speech act. Derrida reaffirms the concept of a performative act which, he claims, 'does not describe something that exists outside of

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[16] Jonathan Culler, 'Philosophy and Literature' 503-19.
[17] John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (2nd edition), ed. by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975; 1st edn 1955), p. 5-15.

language and prior to it. It produces or transforms a situation, it effects'.[18] His discussion of the performative focuses on the general iterability of the sign; its ability to be cited in absence of its referent, to break with context and to create meanings outside the original intentions of the speaker/author. He therefore considers that the possibility of misfire is contained within the very structure of the sign and thus is an intrinsic feature of performative acts. More recently, the concept of performativity has been taken up by theorists of gender and sexuality, most notably in the work of Judith Butler.[19] Butler extends the notion of performativity to gendered identities, arguing that gender is not an expression of a pre-existing essence, but is constituted through the repetition of a series of culturally intelligible acts.

These various interpretations of the performative all point to the importance of context in the creation of meaning. The act or sign does not have a stable or intrinsic meaning in itself, but rather, meaning is contingent upon the social and cultural framework in which it is interpreted. As Mieke Bal insists, 'performativity misses its effectivity if the act is not cushioned in a culture that remembers what that act can do'.[20] If performative acts take on meaning according to the contexts in which they are executed, then theories of performativity have an obvious importance in works that explore questions of travel. The notion of performing an identity presupposes a semiotic understanding of reality, whilst travel, as a practice which involves moving between cultures and different signifying systems, calls for an understanding of the way in which

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[18] Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event, Context', in *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 1-23 (p. 13).
[19] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*; *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York, London: Routledge, 1993); *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York, London: Routledge, 1997).
[20] Mieke Bal, 'Performance and Performativity', in *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 174-212 (p. 176).

signs operate and are interpreted by different communities. As David Scott maintains, 'travel writing focuses on how the other or a different episteme is experienced by the individual consciousness which involves a questioning of the way meaning is produced and a widening of understanding of the various ways signs may be understood to work'.[21]

In the context of French travel writing, Feroza Basu explores the possibility of ethnic identities as performative, although she acknowledges that this theory has yet to gain wide recognition.[22] She discusses examples of individuals who attempt to travel in 'another skin' in order to experience what they consider to be a more authentic mode of living in another culture. Her analysis focuses on the writing of Marc Boulet in which he manipulates outward bodily signs of skin colour and clothing to pass as Chinese and Indian and eventually internalises this perception, as at one point coming to think of himself as Chinese.[23] Basu argues, however, that Boulet's attempts to construct his ethnic identity appear as parodies of reality rather than working to undermine the sense of ethnicity as a fixed essence.

This chapter will examine how the protagonist's divided self is represented textually before showing how this division is resolved through a performative construction of ethnic identity which involves a conscious process of switching between different sign systems. It shows how cultural competencies are learned, often manipulated, exaggerated or disguised in order for the protagonist to achieve her desired outcome.

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[21] David Scott, *Semiologies of Travel: From Gautier to Baudrillard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 24.
[22] Feroza Basu, 'Confronting the "Travel" in Twentieth-Century Travel Literature in French', in *New Approaches to Twentieth-Century Travel Literature in French: History, Genre, Theory*, Charles Forsdick, Siobhan Shilton and Feroza Basu (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 131-202.
[23] Basu, p. 157.

The giving and assuming of names, food preparation and consumption, clothing and personal appearance, ceremonial occasions, language and religion are discussed as indicators of cultural codes and competencies. After demonstrating how, for Hirst, cultural belonging is made possible through a conscious enactment of cultural codes and practices, the final section asks whether cultural identity is represented as something which can be adopted at will by the individual or whether there are any constraining factors which limit the effects of cultural performativity.

THE REPRESENTATION OF A DIVIDED SELF

The problem facing Hirst is presented as: 'il problema di conciliare due mondi completamente diversi che pure erano entrambi miei' (p. 192). Various cultural critics have discussed the disconcerting effect on subjectivity which occurs when the individual, whether *mestiza* (Anzaldúa) or tourist (Scott), encounters two different value systems or frames of reference: 'The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision.'[24] David Scott maintains that 'conflicting sign systems engage in a power struggle in which the newly individual consciousness is caught up in a relation of often irresolvable tension'.[25] For Hirst, the division between two cultural codes touches upon all aspects of her life. It is mirrored in her name, Rose Marie, which she points out is 'non un nome unico ma diviso in due' (p. 145). The name itself is neither Chinese nor Italian but taken from the homonymous 1936 movie starring Jeanette Macdonald.[26] Geographically, her

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[24] Gloria Anzaldúa, 'La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness', in *Mixed Race Studies: A Reader*, ed. by Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 139-42 (p. 140).
[25] David Scott, *Semiologies of Travel*, p. 26.
[26] Aside from Hirst's performative construction of cultural identity, her texts also contain numerous examples of actual performances including the American films, *Rose Marie* (1936) and *Love is a many-*

life is divided by two continents, countries and cultures so that she is unable to feel a sense of attachment to either place: 'Non appartenevo pienamente a nessun paese' (pp. 218-19). Religiously she is divided between two major belief systems: 'Sono cresciuta tra due religioni' (p. 242). Although she spent all her childhood in various Catholic missions, she was also influenced by her grandmother's Buddhist beliefs. As a child she prayed without knowing whether she was addressing a Christian or Buddhist deity (p. 191). The result of the division between religious systems is that the protagonist does not have a religious 'home', a belief system with which she can identify fully, but nevertheless still feels the need for some form of support. She attributes her visit to a fortune teller to this lack of religious conviction: 'Avevo bisogno probabilmente di aggrapparmi a qualcosa' (p. 217). Linguistically, too she is unable to feel 'at home' in either Chinese or Italian communities, as she grows up speaking French and English at the mission in Shanghai. On arrival in Italy, she is unable to communicate in Italian with the local authorities (p. 197). When she returns to China, she is only able to communicate in a childlike manner, despite having taken Mandarin Chinese lessons in Milan. Notwithstanding the multiplicity of dialects spoken in China, she finds that some words have changed meaning over time and others are no longer in use. This leads to misunderstandings and the uncomfortable realisation that her 'mother tongue' has become a foreign language: 'Quando si impara una lingua straniera sembra di regredire a una condizione infantile' (*Il mondo*, p. 104).

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splendored thing (1955); Baia Verde's training as a classical opera singer (*Blu Cina*, p. 46); the theatrical show directed by the grandfather as the culmination of her parent's wedding ceremony (*Blu Cina*, p. 111); Chinese opera (*Inchiostro*, pp. 114-15); the school play in Italy where Rose Marie is forced into the role of a Chinese boy (*Blu Cina*, p. 226); Hirst's career as a fashion model; the traditional story recited by a blind man at the tea house in Chengdu (*Blu Cina*, p. 330). These examples of performance reinforce the way in which roles and characters can be adopted through signs, costumes, fans and masks and they also point to how images of China are constructed in the western imagination and vice versa (*Blu Cina*, p. 237).

The division between her Chinese self and Italian self is also reflected in the structure of the text. *Blu Cina* is ostensibly an autobiographical text as Hirst affirms in the opening lines that 'si riferisce ai periodi più significativi della mia vita' (p. 9). She insists that it is a truthful account of her family history, written from memory, personal research and interviews: 'I personaggi, gli ambienti, gli episodi rievocati sono tutti veri' (p. 247).[27] Yet, in spite of its pretensions to autobiography, over half of the text is dedicated to the period before the birth of the protagonist. The sheer amount of textual space that is given over to this period emphasizes the significance of her parents' interracial marriage in the development of her subjectivity. The second section breaks with the chronological narrative of part one, fluctuating between accounts of Hirst's teenage years in Italy and memories of her early childhood in China. Once again, this reflects the duality of her personality: 'L'impostazione data a quello che scrivevo aveva portato ad una divisione della mia vita in due parti distinte: una parte cinese e una italiana. Metà cinese e metà italiana, come lo sono io' (*Inchiostro*, p. 7). Naples evokes memories of Ningbo; the Italian police commissioner reminds her of Kon-Kon, the village doctor; the school at Acqui Terme is reminiscent of St Joseph's convent school in Shanghai. The pendulum effect created by the narrative as it oscillates from East to West is a further manifestation of her sense of self as existing in a transitional phase, in-between two cultures. Like this section of the text, she is 'perpetuamente in bilico tra

[27] Although the first section of *Blu Cina* offers an account analogous to that of *Passaggio a Shanghai*, the narrative voice shifts from a third person to first person narrator. For example, 'La bambina era venuta alla luce nel periodo più cruento della guerra in Cina (*Passaggio*, p. 171) becomes 'Io venni alla luce nel periodo più cruento della guerra in Cina' (*Blu Cina*, p. 133). However, as most of this section refers to the period before the author's birth, this first person-narrator seems to disappear behind the story of Baia Verde and 'Il Veneziano'. The narrator is able to discern the inner thoughts, feelings and motives of the two characters, which lends an aura of fiction to the account.

questi due mondi, perpetuamente lacerato da due poli, il principio Yin e il principio Yang' (p. 225).

Her divided subjectivity is further reflected textually through a series of binary oppositions, mother/father, China/Italy, Buddhism/Catholicism, Yin/Yang, all of which reduce to the major opposition of East/West. Hirst refers to the meeting of her parents as 'l'incontro tra Occidente e Oriente' (p. 9). This is the first of many instances in which personal identity is linked to place and her parents come to embody their respective hemispheres.[28] China is personified as a mother: 'Oggi che vivo all'estero la Cina è come una madre' (p. 306). Her parents are depicted as falling in love, not just with each other as individuals but with the respective countries that they represent. Their desire for each other is thus presented as being bound up with their longing for another place:

> La fucina del loro amore è stata la Cina, con la sua cultura, la sua storia, le sue tradizioni. Anche di questo lui si è innamorato, come Baia Verde si è innamorata di lui perché ha sempre sognato di andare in Italia e lui rappresenta un lembo d'Italia che le è venuto incontro. (p. 68)

When Baia Verde takes 'Il Veneziano' to visit the town of Souzhou, the so-called Venice of China, his praise for the town is taken by Baia Verde as a personal compliment (p. 88). The experiences of Baia Verde and China are also closely intertwined; the upshot of their encounters with the West is negative and they are abandoned: 'I contatti con l'Occidente si erano rivelati pieni di sofferenze per Baia Verde come per la Cina' (p. 184).

A further symbol of the division between East and West and one which is common to all her texts, is the opposition between rail and river transportation in which the train comes to represent the West and the river, China. The front cover of *Blu Cina* presents

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[28] In Ramondino's representation of China in *In viaggio*, place also comes to be associated with the identity of a parental figure, as she senses her father's presence through apparitions at various stages of her journey (pp. 9-15).

the figure of a young woman waiting on a railway platform as a train speeds past, suggesting transition and movement as central themes of the text. Hirst has no memories of train journeys as a child. She claims that river transportation was the more favoured mode of transport in China as the older generation believed that the vibration of the tracks would disturb their ancestors. The railway network, she asserts, was imposed by the imperial powers for their own commercial interests. Her first train journey in Italy is a journey into the unknown, it signifies a violent break with the past: 'Il treno rappresentava quindi per me un'assoluta novità, la partenza per una civiltà nuova' (p. 211). The train follows a linear course; it is associated with western modernity, mechanisation and violence:

> Nata e cresciuta in Cina, il treno era diventato per me il mezzo innovatore e crudele, senza ritorno, che forzatamente era entrato nella mia vita e mi trasportava sempre più lontana dal passato attraverso un tunnel di paure. (*Inchiostro*, p. 25)

On her return to China after over thirty years in Italy, the train has become such a familiar mode of transport that her attachment to it symbolises her westernisation and subsequent loss of a part of her Chinese identity:

> Il treno riparte e mi abbandona portandomi via qualche cosa divenuta familiare, una specie di sicurezza, espressione dell'affidabile meccanica occidentale. La sua partenza mi lascia un vuoto. Mi rendo conto in quel momento di essere anch'io ancorata alla meccanizzazione dell'Occidente. (*Il mondo*, p. 39)

The river, on the other hand, is always in flux, its journey is cyclical and it exists in harmony with its natural environment: 'Quanto più silenziose erano le barche sui fiumi' Hirst remarks on her first train journey in Italy (*Inchiostro*, p. 34). The narrative process is also likened to the journey of a river: 'Procedeva con esitazione. Poi incominciò a prendere forma, ingrossandosi man mano che vi affluivano aggiunte. Affrontati ed aggirati alcuni ostacoli, aveva ripreso a scorrere lento e limpido come un fiume'

(*Inchiostro*, p. 7). The structure of *Blu Cina*, her early life in China, migration to Italy and return to China is depicted as the completion of a circle. Returning to China thus represents 'completare il ciclo della mia vita. Come seguire il fiume lungo il percorso che lo porterà alla sua foce' (*Inchiostro*, p. 8).

The sense of a divided subjectivity finds its expression in the authorial protagonist's sense of space. Shanghai, the city in which Hirst spent much of her early childhood, is also a city constructed on a cultural and racial divide. It is described as the meeting of the East and West, and significantly, this is also the place where her mother and father first meet. Hirst maintains that her first encounter with the West occurred in Shanghai: 'Posso dire quindi che il mio primo incontro con l'Occidente sia avvenuto a Shanghai. E fu un incontro aspro, aggressivo, a causa della guerra' (p. 221). The most cosmopolitan of all Chinese cities, Shanghai is dominated by European style architecture: 'L'influenza occidentale era dominante. La si notava dai molti boulevards, dai grandi edifici e dagli alti grattacieli lungo i controviali del Bund' (*Inchiostro*, p 45). 1930s Shanghai was a contact zone where the British, Americans, French, Italians and Germans working in the international concessions lived in close proximity. The Chinese however, were kept at a distance and often the only real contact that these westerners had with the local Chinese was with their servants. Hirst portrays the privileged lifestyle of Americans and Europeans in Shanghai, with evenings at embassy functions and social clubs:

> Il Cathay era l'albergo più prestigioso della città e come tale lo si voleva considerare feudo esclusivo degli occidentali; i cittadini cinesi non erano ospiti graditi e le giovani e piacenti donne cinesi lo erano ancora meno. (p. 55)

> Gente che non aveva mai imparato una parola di cinese che non fosse un ordine per la servitù, che non aveva mai voluto che un cinese entrasse allo Shanghai Club o Peking Club dove una volta alla settimana cenavano in dinner jacket come fossero al Claridges di Londra. (p. 180)

Whilst Shanghai can be said to be the meeting place between the East and West, it is not a place where the two cultures blend. On the contrary, the cultural divide is rigidly maintained. The social and spatial organisation of Shanghai can thus be seen to reflect the way that Hirst initially internalises her biracial identity, not as a fusion of two cultures but as a sharp division between two incompatible worlds.

The spaces available for a biracial child in China and in Italy are shown to have been severely limited, often experienced by the protagonist as imposed homes. Hirst is forced to live in the margins of society, often hidden away from the outside world: 'Ero abituata a vivere negli stretti confini dei cortili, dei "recinti"' (p. 238). When the Japanese army occupy the concession in Tianjin and the family are forced to return to Shanghai, Baia Verde and Rose Marie travel in a separate carriage from 'Il Veneziano' posing as the relatives of a servant. Her mother, she claims, was 'costretta dalle "ragioni" politiche a mascherare la sua identità e rinnegare la realtà del suo matrimonio' (p.146). Likewise, when the Japanese search the Catholic mission, Rose Marie is hidden from sight as her European somatic features would have placed her under threat. Her mother explains: 'I padri hanno fatto in tempo a nasconderla; con quei capelli ondulati e il nasino dritto è inconfondibile in mezzo alle altre bambine' (p. 162). Instead of showing her face, she hides behind a fan, which operates not just as a symbol of Chinese identity, but also as an instrument which enables her to disguise her facial lineaments:

> Quante volte da piccola avevo nascosto la mia faccia dietro un ventaglio proprio quando incontravo per la strada i giapponesi. Allora però ero terrorizzata di essere riconosciuta invece come mezza europea! (*Inchiostro* p. 151, see also *Blu Cina*, p. 277).

When the protection of the fan is removed, she feels acutely aware of her physical difference: 'ero allo scoperto' (p. 219). From an early age then, she is used to masking her identity, not just because of the social stigma attached to a child of mixed race, but

because she transgresses the racial boundaries which, particularly in wartime, operate as a fundamental distinction between national groups. Her diversity thus becomes a threat to her own safety and her 'in-between' status leads to feelings of guilt and betrayal. When Hirst leaves China, she believes that she had been expelled her as a punishment for being only half Chinese: 'Forse era proprio per questo, pensavo, perché ero cinese solo a metà, e questo costituiva un tradimento' (p. 291).

She is therefore denied a space in society, is hidden away and forced to mask her identity as a biracial individual. Perhaps this explains why she preferred to live in another Catholic mission in Italy rather than accept the possibility of adoption. She claims: 'volevo essere confuse fra le tante' (*Inchiostro*, p. 39). She prefers the anonymity that institutional life affords her, one in which she can fade away into the group rather than a life where she would have to stand out as an individual and forge bonds with other people: 'non volevo appartenere a nessuno' (p. 218). The difficult transition period following her arrival in Italy is characterised by abnormal eating habits, a distorted self image and low self-esteem. Internalising the negative gaze, she describes herself as 'goffa' (p. 223). Even looking at herself in the mirror becomes traumatic, as if she is unable to acknowledge her own existence:

> Non volevo più guardarmi allo specchio; e mi vergognavo terribilmente quando noi ragazze dell'istituto dovevano sfilare nelle processioni e a volte nei funerali, e la gente bisbigliava al mio passaggio: "Guardate la cinesina". (pp. 223-4)

Her social invisibility is reinforced at school in Italy as, initially at least, her name is not on the morning roll-call because she was not officially registered as a pupil: 'Mancava il mio nome, perché ero solo un'uditrice' (p. 227). Again, she is not recognised as a complete individual; she can listen but not participate fully. One of the most troubling

experiences for Rose Marie occurs when she is made to play a Chinese character called Pikekai in a school play, even though Pikekai was a young boy:

> La situazione si fece più pesante dopo una recita in cui mi avevano fatto fare la parte di Pikekai. / Dovevo cantare con un codino che mi pendeva dal cappello: "Son venuto da Shanghai, dalla Cina poverina, che abbandona i suoi bambini ...". Pikekai non era una ragazza ma un ragazzo. (p. 226)

This experience again underscores her feelings that she is not recognised as a distinct individual but instead is forced to act out a racial stereotype, a role which not only reinforces common perceptions of China, but is especially poignant for Rose Marie as she too had been abandoned by her parents. Here, it is the child's racial identity which is seen as the most important indicator of difference and which comes to override her gendered identity. The social stigma attached to the child of mixed race is not limited to Italy, as also in China she falls under the objectifying gaze of society. It is difference rather than similarity that is seized upon, ensuring that her feelings of estrangement are common to both countries:

> Anche in Cina, per la parte europea che mi veniva da mio padre, mi ero sentita qualche volta estranea. I ragazzi coi quali giocavo, puntando il dito verso di me, mi chiamavano *wai-guo-ren*, "straniera". (p. 224)

A PERFORMATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

The experiences of her early childhood evidently had a major impact on Hirst's sense of self and sense of belonging. The chasm between Chinese and Italian culture is referred to as a laceration, implying both the severity of the wound and the violence by which it is inflicted and clearly indicating the emotional upheaval involved for the child. Yet, despite the feelings of being divided between two cultures, she does succeed in resolving her sense of fractured identity through the adoption of conscious strategies for the performance of cultural identity and developing the ability to switch between these

cultural codes: 'Tra la missione e la casa dei nonni cinesi ero costretta a un continuo sforzo di adattamento, a un continuo andirivieni tra il mondo cinese e quello europeo, tra la religione cattolica e quella buddhista' (p. 153). Hirst refers to the process by which she transcends the divide as a conscious construction of her own identity: 'Avevo alle spalle le lacerazioni di un'infanzia solitaria, divisa tra due civiltà, la difficoltà di essere ovunque straniera. Volevo costruirmi, ritrovarmi' (p. 255). Cultural identity, for Hirst, is not represented as something which arises from a pre-existing essence, nor has it been transmitted from her parents who, for the most part, are absent from her life.[29] Instead, she refers here to a conscious construction of subjectivity, which is again linked to place - she needs to construct herself, in order to locate herself. The conscious construction of cultural identity is also referred to in the quotation which opens this chapter: 'avevo creato intorno a lei una muraglia' (*Inchiostro*, pp 73-4). In view of the context, this is a likely allusion to the Great Wall of China as Hirst later refers to the importance of China's physical and geographical boundaries (the Great Wall, the sea, mountains and desert) in excluding foreigners and keeping cultural identity intact (*Cartoline*, p. 103). The wall marks the borders of the country, the plant and metaphorically, it defines the boundaries between the self and other. Hirst is thus able to reconcile the two distinct influences in her life by a deliberate crafting of her own identity through a manipulation of the signifying practices that go to make up cultural identity.

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[29] Hirst has only one meeting with her father in Italy, whilst her mother simply disappears from the narrative as the narrator's memories fade. When Hirst arrives in Beijing she tells the taxi driver that all her Chinese relatives were dead as, she says, it was simpler that way (*Blu Cina*, p. 303). In *Inchiostro di Cina*, she provides a clearer explanation: 'Di "Baia Verde" mi rimane solo un ricordo visivo, perché il nostro legame non ebbe quasi più modo di consolidarsi durante le sue brevi visite che divennero sempre più rare. Ognuno di noi girava in orbite opposte. Ci allontanavamo sempre di più finché il ricordo dell'una e dell'altra sfumava' (p. 71).

Hirst's understanding of the sign systems which operate in various cultural contexts is evidenced throughout her writing but is most notable in *Cartoline da Pechino*, *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore* and the third section of *Blu Cina*. The heightened attention to cultural signs in these texts is not surprising as they all represent her return to China as a tourist and, as a tourist, she is engaged in a process of reading and interpreting culture as a system of signs.[30] As David Scott maintains in *Semiologies of Travel*:

> Ttravel writing focuses on how the other or a different episteme is experienced by the individual consciousness which involves a questioning of the way meaning is produced and a widening of understanding of the various ways signs may be understood to work.[31]

Hirst provides her implied (Western) reader with detailed explanations of the meanings of signs in Chinese culture, for instance mandarin ducks symbolise conjugal fidelity, noodles denote longevity, pomegranates represent fertility and the colour red signifies happiness and good fortune (*Pechino*, pp. 133-34). She also recognises that meanings of signs are never fixed, but rather change according to time and place. She discusses, for example, the varying cultural interpretations of the female body, claiming that in China a woman's body does not have the same erotic significance as it does in the West (p. 313; see also *Pechino*, p. 128). She thus highlights the possibility of different perceptions of the same reality: 'Non si tratta di indifferenza verso la donna, ma solo di differenza di concezione di ciò che per loro è femminilità (*Il mondo*, p. 35). She further explains how actions themselves do not hold any intrinsic meaning, but also depend upon the cultural context in which they are performed: 'Le regole di comportamento, a volte, sono del tutto contrastanti con le nostre: guardarsi negli occhi è considerato un

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[30] See Jonathan Culler, 'The Semiotics of Tourism', p.155.
[31] Scott, p. 24.

atto d'arroganza, mentre spingere è la normalità non scortesia.'[32] Moreover, she discusses how customs change over time, explaining that the traditional bowed greeting has been replaced by the handshake (p. 313; see also *Il Mondo*, p. 104).

Personal names are also shown to be important signifiers of identity. An individual's name and age are often considered to be fixed markers of identity, but just as other signs are subject to change, these too are shown to be culturally determined. Hirst explains that, in China, a person's age includes the period of gestation and that age can also be bestowed by other family members as a gift:

> Il nonno mi fece dono di un anno per elevarmi di rango nella gerarchia familiare. I cinesi hanno già un anno di vita quando nascono perché viene compreso nel computo anche il periodo della gestazione. I bambini possono avere, così, anche due anni il giorno del loro primo compleanno; ma quel giorno io, che già avevo due anni di diritto, ne avevo in realtà tre se si teneva conto del dono di mio nonno, Saggezza Radiante. (p. 134)

Names too are considered temporary, as opposed to being fixed for life:

> In Cina non è raro cambiare il nome. Si può avere un nome da lattante, un nome da scolaro, un nome di cortesia, un nome professionale, un nome quando si hanno incarichi importanti o quando si è oggetto di un grande privilegio. (pp. 106-7)

As she relates her family history, Hirst describes how, according to Chinese tradition, only the father could name the child and that owing to a father's enforced absence, newly born infants were frequently given a provisional name: 'Non mi venne dato subito un nome, spettava solo al padre quel diritto; mi chiamarono semplicemente Bébé' (p. 134). Her grandfather too was given the provisional name of Diecimila Primavere, before his father returned after two years of working on the Yangtze waterworks to officially name the infant Saggezza Radiante (p. 24). In contrast to the often arbitrary nature of personal names in Western culture, Hirst explains that Chinese names are

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[32] See Massimo Morello's interview with Bamboo Hirst in *La Repubblica*, November 2006, 'Fate attenzione ai frammenti di realtà', <http://www.dweb.repubblica it/dweb/2006/09/23/attualita/attualita/278fat517278.html> [accessed 1 December 2006]

chosen with great care and often denote a specific characteristic or situation (*Cartoline*, p. 106, *Blu Cina*, p. 18). The name Baia Verde, for example, was chosen by her grandfather. It recalls the bights of the river Yangtze and represents a place of refuge and protection. An element lacking in a child's astrological birth chart would be compensated for in that person's name, impacting, according to this belief, on the personality and destiny of the individual (p. 18). Personal names therefore can be read as important components in the construction of subjectivity in Hirst's texts.

The assigning of a name operates as a performative act as it creates a new position for the subject and alters relations between the individual and society. Various naming ceremonies can inaugurate new obligations and privileges and impact upon how the subject is viewed and treated by others. When the father, 'Il Veneziano' is named as Auspicio Felice, this indicates his entry into Baia Verde's family. The christening ceremony, in which Rose Marie is so named, serves to forge a relationship between the child and church and facilitates her entry into the Catholic mission of Ningbo (pp. 144-45). The insertion of Rose Marie's surname, Minella, (incidentally, the only time her father's surname is mentioned in the text) in the school register signified that, after a period of invisibility, she was accepted as a full member of the class and as such had a certain responsibility towards her studies: 'Quel nome regolarmente inserito nell'appello suonava per me come un avvertimento: da quel momento in poi avrei dovuto studiare con impegno' (p. 233).

Hirst demonstrates firstly that only certain persons are invested with the power to bestow a name on another individual, secondly that names are liable to change, that they tell us something about the circumstances of the individual's life and they impact upon

the way the subject relates to the outside world. Rose Marie's decision to change her name to Bamboo can therefore be read as a turning point in her texts. The name change occurs in the final sentence of *Inchiostro di Cina*: 'Da allora ho sempre voluto essere chiamata Bamboo, e non più Rose Marie' (*Inchiostro*, p. 151). *Inchiostro* opens with a description of Hirst as being divided, half Italian and half Chinese and, like the second section of *Blu Cina*, the narrative fluctuates between Italy and China. The name change coincides with the period of her life in which she claims to have reconciled the two halves of her dual identity:

> La mia "diversità", la mia dualità continua ad accompagnarmi; ma ora le lacerazioni erano superate. Più che sentirmi estranea dunque sembrava che io potessi trovare dovunque qualcosa che riecheggiava in me. (p. 281)

The name change in the final section thus represents a healing of this division, a synthesis of these two parts of her identity and an attempt to adopt a different position. Unlike Rose Marie, the name Bamboo is singular; it no longer reflects the split identity imposed by her parents. Notably, Bamboo is not a Chinese name, nor is it translated into the Italian form, Bambù. Hirst assumes this name following a comment by Irvine Penn, a fashion photographer whom she met in New York (pp. 281-82). It indicates the referent has Chinese origins, yet has become European. The name Bamboo is meant to denote flexibility, the ability to change with circumstances and is also an indication of agency:

> "Bamboo" è il nome che io mi sono voluto dare in un momento di autostima. [...] Paragonavo la mia capacità di reagire ai momenti difficili della vita alla flessibilità dei canneti di bambù che resistono alle raffiche di vento. Da allora ho voluto chiamarmi Bamboo, seguendo la tradizione cinese che consente di cambiare il nome di una persona se cambiano le circostanze della vita. (p. 282)

After the distressing experiences of childhood, discussed above, it is significant that the name change is linked to an increase in her self-esteem. As Maria P. P. Root argues: 'to

name oneself is to validate one's existence and declare visibility.'[33] Root here refers to the designation of racial categories in the US census, arguing that the lack of recognition of biracial and multiracial persons relegates them to an 'in-between' status and that self-naming represents a significant form of liberation and empowerment, but the assertion can apply equally to personal names: to name oneself rather than to accept a given name represents a form of empowerment. The name change is perhaps the defining moment of the transition from a problematic sense of identity to a consciousness of the ways in which identities function. After being hidden from society as a child, then made an object of derision, the protagonist now declares her visibility as an adult and carves out her own space as a subject.

The preparation and consumption of food forms another important part of the semiotic system of culture and is therefore closely linked to the question of cultural competency.[34] Rituals surrounding food can often reflect underlying beliefs and values of a community. Khiang-chih Chang, for example, suggests that the binary opposition of Yin and Yang, a fundamental concept in Chinese philosophy, is reflected in Chinese dietary practices which seek out harmony and balance between culinary flavours and textures.[35] As Hirst shows in her depiction of family life in China, food forms an essential part of most cultural and religious celebrations, whilst significant moments of an individual's life, such as birth and marriage, are turned into community celebrations through common participation in a meal or feast (pp. 109, 133). Hirst dedicates sections

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[33] Maria P. P. Root, 'Within, Between, and Beyond Race', in *'Mixed Race' Studies: A Reader*, ed. by Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe (London & New York: Routledge, 2004, pp. 143-48 (p. 145).
[34] For a discussion of the semiology of food in the travel writings of major French writers, see David Scott, 'Grammars of gastronomy: the raw and the cooked – Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Boman, Leiris', in *Semiologies of Travel from Gautier to Baudrillard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 189-208.
[35] Quoted in Scott, p. 191.

of her texts to explaining Chinese culinary traditions including the composition of meals, the balance of flavours, the use of *kuaizi* (chopsticks), the tea ceremony and the rituals and rhythm of eating in China (p. 258; see also *Cartoline*, p. 47). Culinary traditions and people's attitudes to food can even reflect a nation's history as Hirst explains that in a country such as China with a history of famine brought about by poor harvests and political instability, almost anything is considered edible (p. 272). She claims that the question 'hai mangiato riso?' is still a common greeting amongst rural dwellers as the consumption of food becomes a confirmation of their existence and well-being. The links between food and identity is reinforced by the expression, 'mangio, dunque sono' which Hirst uses to highlight the importance of food in Chinese culture (*Cartoline*, p. 46).

Italy and China are both renowned for their regional varieties of cookery which operate as important symbols of local identity and pride. Local recipes form part of a body of cultural knowledge often passed from one generation to another and thus competency in the preparation of a local dish can signify a family group's connection to a particular location. Hirst, on the other hand, after having spent most of her life outside a traditional family environment lacks the necessary skills which would enable her to perform the culturally assigned role of wife and mother. Her lack of cultural competency in the preparation of western style food becomes a source of tension between herself and her husband and especially when she is first married, mealtimes become an ordeal. Her first attempts at preparing dinner end in disaster and her husband spends the evening reading in silence. As a result, she feels rejected and alienated:

> La sua smania mi angosciava e accresceva la mia paura di sbagliare. Mi rendevo conto che ogni mio gesto veniva controllato: come sbuciavo una mela, quanto sale mettevo nelle pietanze, come tenevo le posate, come pronunciavo una certa parola in inglese. (p. 265)

Marriage is described as her 'quarto recinto', a small space in which she feels uncomfortable and suffocated as her every action is the subject of scrutiny. When her husband is absent, Chinese food becomes a mode of escapism as she prepares Chinese dishes, eats with her *kuaizi* and drinks tea (p. 266). Later, her learned competency in Italian cookery becomes a source of pride, and provides proof of her ability to switch between cultures: 'E cucino alla cinese, alla piemontese e faccio il pesto alla genovese, come se volessi riunire per lei [her daughter, Nicole] i tre luoghi determinanti della mia vita: la Cina, Acqui, Genova' (p. 285).

Food, for Hirst, also provides an important link with her childhood past and serves to reinforce her memories of China. As Claudia Roden in *The Book of Jewish Food* writes: 'Dishes are important because they are a link with the past, a celebration of roots, a symbol of continuity.'[36] On her first visit to London, one of the first things she does is to seek out a Chinese restaurant. She orders all the dishes on the menu, eager to be transported back to the tastes and aromas of her early childhood:

> A Londra cercai di ritrovare l'atmosfera che da anni avevo perso. Entrai nel ristorante cinese Ho-Ho a Mayfair. Volevo rivedere i colori della Cina, risentirne i sapori, gli odori, i rumori. Volevo sentire parlare cinese, anche senza capire, perché i camerieri in realtà parlavano in Cantonese; mi piaceva lo stesso come una musica di fondo. Volevo di nuovo usare i *kuaizi*, le bacchettine che usavo da bambina. (p. 257)

The experience is comforting for Hirst as it seems to provide confirmation that her memories correspond to an external reality. Whilst dining in the restaurant, Hirst's behaviour attracts the attention of a group of young people of Chinese origin living in London. At first, they are curious as to her ethnic background but eventually recognise her as having Chinese origins from her ability to use chopsticks. They invite Hirst over

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[36] Claudia Roden, *The Book of Jewish Food: An Odyssey from Samarkand and Vilna to the Present Day* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 11.

to their table in what is the first step towards a close friendship between them. These people are brought together by a sense that they share a similar ancestry but it is food that provides the basis for this mutual identification.

The return to China after many years of living in Italy leaves Hirst feeling disillusioned. The China that confronts her has changed beyond recognition. People are wearing western clothes and have Western hairstyles, the cities are dominated by modern buildings, yet it is in food that she she rediscovers what, in her eyes, is the authentic China:

> La prima sera passata a Pechino, ho ritrovato la mia Cina in un piatto di minestra di verdura! [...] È stato questo il mio primo vero "assaggio" della Cina. Ho concentrato il mio interesse nei primi giorni soprattutto nel cibo, perché il palato è stato il primo dei miei sensi a risvegliarsi. (pp. 304-05)

Food products, recipes, eating utensils and the rituals and etiquette surrounding food are all examples of cultural competencies that Hirst has to learn and perform in order to be accepted as Italian or Chinese. Hirst's ability to switch between culinary codes is an indication of her wider ability to alternate successfully between two diverse cultural codes. Food further provides the link between the China of the past and that of the present, and bridges the divide between her adult self and childhood self.

Clothing is another important semiotic element in the construction of personal identity and group belonging. Hirst's Chinese ancestors, an ethnic tribe referred to as Miao Blu, are distinguished by the colour of their garments. The blue of their clothes differentiates them from other Miao communities who wore red, black or green (p. 16). The colour not only identifies them as an ethnic group, but it links them to a specific place as plants grown in the local area are required for the preparation of the fabric dye:

> I Miao Blu, a cui appartengono i miei antenati, dovevano il loro cognome al blu indaco, il colore che prediligevano per i tessuti dei loro abiti, ricavato da una pianta conosciuta come *lam* "erba blu", diffusa sopratutto nell'alta valle dello Yangtze. (p. 16)

Styles of dress are an important feature of European lifestyle in Shanghai. Specific dress codes operate to exclude the local Chinese population from social clubs and other spaces designated for the sole use of Europeans:

> Ma qui come altrove i soci portavano il cappello di Panama e l'abito bianco; dopo le ore di lavoro, dopo il polo o il tennis, se ne stavano distesi nelle sedie di vimini a bere cocktail ghiacciati serviti dai boys cinesi. (p. 40)

Their clothing is much a performance of social status and class as it is of race. The pure white suit functions as a symbol of European power and privilege. It is noteworthy that this is not a form of attire that would have been popular in their country of origin. Instead, it clearly identifies them as Europeans living in China and marks their difference from the local Chinese residents of Shanghai.

Hirst's problems with bodily image improve when she realises that her difference, the source of frequent embarrassment, can be used to her advantage. This realisation occurs when, as a young woman of seventeen, she receives a compliment from an Italian boy: '[Le sue parole] mi suggerivano per la prima volta che avrei potuto adoperare quella diversità, di cui avevo tanto spesso sofferto, a mio vantaggio' (p. 236). Later, to further her career in the fashion industry she chooses to accentuate her Chinese identity by wearing Oriental style clothes and adopting Chinese hairstyle:

> Per questo cercai di rendermi più orientale. Cercavo di assomigliare a Hiroko, una famosa indossatrice giapponese di Pierre Cardin. Mi pettinavo come lei, lisciando i capelli e facendomi una frangia quadrata, la pettinatura che avevo da bambina. (p. 273)

She plays on her exoticism, emphasising her differences rather than trying to mask them: 'imparai a sottolinare, invece di nascondere, la mia diversità' (p. 225). She does not, however, dress according to the styles of contemporary Chinese women; in any case the figure she tries to emulate is Japanese not Chinese. Instead, she is performing to

western expectations of women from the Far East. Her performance of Chinese identity aimed at a Western audience can thus be read then as a doubly conscious act of identity construction as it involves not just an understanding of the cultural signs operating in China, but what signifies China to the West.

This awareness of how signs operate to signify cultures to other cultures is also evident in photographs as well as her writing. Each time a photograph is mentioned in her texts, it functions to stabilise memory and fix identity as the following examples demonstrate. The photograph of the newly named Auspicio Felice hangs on the wall of her grandparents' house and signifies that he is accepted as an official member of the family (p. 107). Photographs provide documentary evidence of the wedding between Baia Verde and 'Il Veneziano'/Auspicio Felice – they have to be destroyed in order to conceal the marriage (p. 122). It is by means of a photograph that Hirst remembers her mother and father (p. 213). Photographs are said to immortalise their subjects: 'La fotografia rappresenta per loro [i cinesi] come una prova di esistenza e di identità' (*Cartoline*, p. 78). On her return to Shanghai, Hirst attempts to stabilise her memories of childhood (and thus her identity) by taking photographs of places she frequented: 'Scatto subito delle foto prima che anche questi ricordi sbiadiscano nella memoria' (p. 346).

The photograph below encapsulates Hirst's ability to appropriate signs of Chinese identity and present them for a western audience. The photograph of Bamboo Hirst appears on the penultimate page of *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore*, along with a letter addressed to a personified China in which she expresses her affection for and her continued attachment to the country of her birth. The photography is strangely reminiscent of the metaphysical paintings of De Chirico with its disconcerting

proportions, juxtaposition of interior and exterior spaces and the figure of Hirst acting as mannequin. Bamboo Hirst stands to the side, wearing traditional Chinese dress, a *chipao*, holding a fan over the lower part of her face. In the background a door opens on to Tiananmen Square and the entrance to the Forbidden City. The gaze of the onlooker is drawn towards the portrait in the centre of the doorway, that of Mao Zedong. Hirst's appearance, her stature and facial features are notably European, although her black hair and eye contours suggest Asian origins. She is deliberately accentuating her Chinese ethnicity through her choice of dress and through the hand-held fan. As a child, she had used the fan to hide her European features, especially her straight nose (in her view the most obvious indicator of her European parentage) but now reveals all apart from her mouth and chin. This time the fan is no longer being used to mask her origins but to emphasise her connection with China. Her back is towards the door, and she is taking a step forward, indicating that China is her past and that she is leaving it behind. The proportions of the photograph, the door opening above the square, makes the people seem minute in comparison with Hirst, another indication that China is in the distant past. The violent and brutal nature of the past is suggested by the figure of Mao and the accompanying letter: 'siamo state entrambe spesso offese dalla violenza della vita e da conflitti interni', which links Hirst's own experiences with the history of China. The door, though, remains open, offering the possibility of return (p. 247).

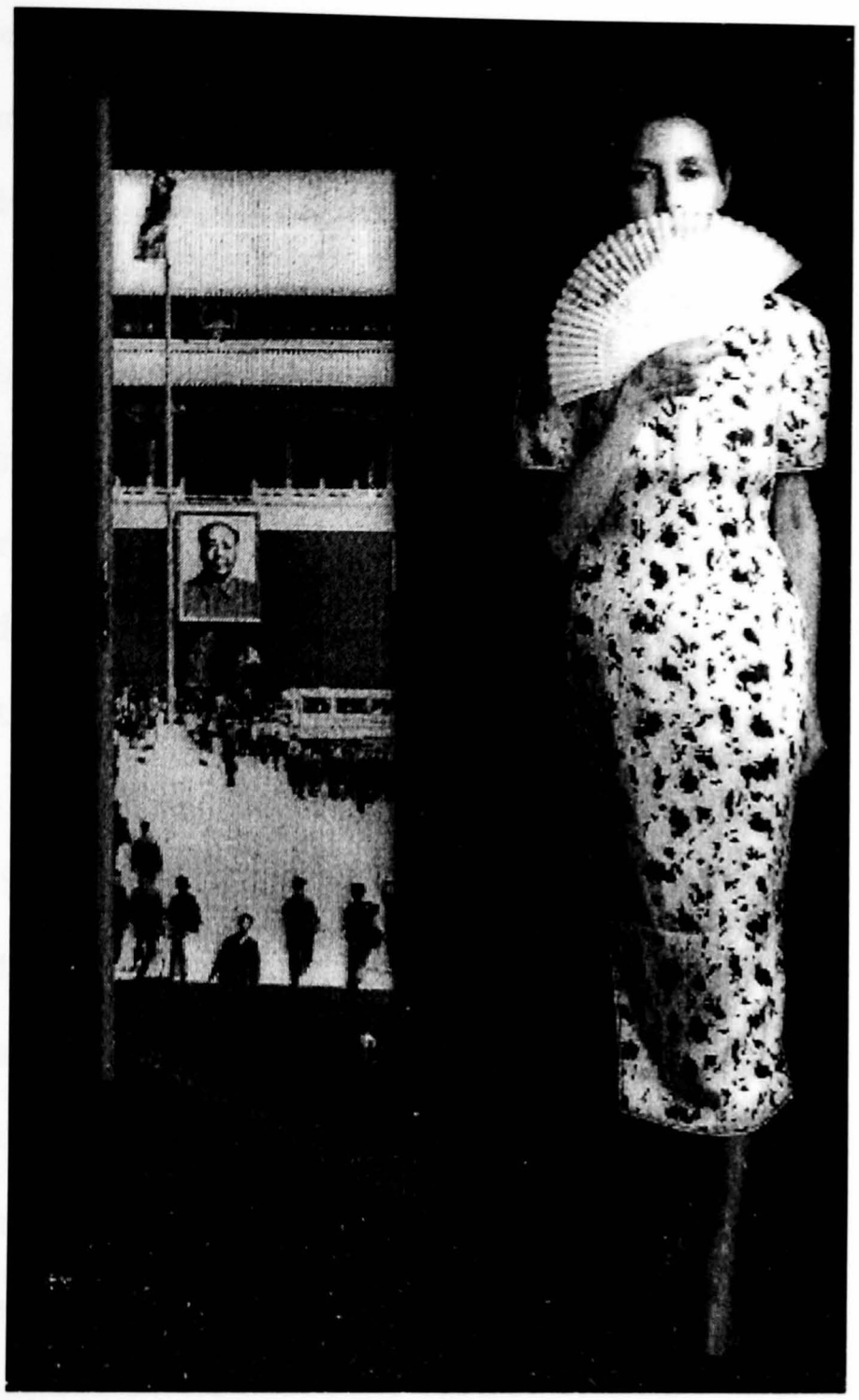

Figure 1. From *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore* p. 246. (Photograph by Giorgio Lotti by permission of Contrasto)

Hirst's photograph is further declaration of her visibility as a subject. It represents a performance of cultural identity that again is aimed at a Western audience. The figure evokes Western ideas of Chinese identity, or to rephrase Daniel Boorstin, it appears

more 'Chinesy than chinese'.[37] Boorstin uses such an expression to describe the tourist who, in an encounter with another culture, seeks out what he/she perceives to be foreign rather than what is authentic. To become attractive to the tourist, a sight must be marked as worthy of attention, whilst tourist practices such as buying souvenirs, taking photographs, sending postcards and writing about the travel experience all engage in this signifying process of marking out sights. In the same way, Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, the image of Mao and the *chipao* operate in the photograph to signify China to the Western reader. Culler, however, rejects the idea that there is an authentic in the sense of an unmediated way of experiencing other cultures. Rather, he insists that the authentic and the inauthentic are part of the same semiotic framework, that even the authentic must be marked as such and there is therefore no escape from the semiotic code.[38] The elusive search for the authentic is illustrated by Hirst when she revisits Shanghai as an adult, retracing her steps around the former Convent school and Cathedral in Shanghai where she had spent her early childhood. She attempts to reconstruct the past from fragments of memory, but the modern city, seen now from an adult perspective is disorientating. It seems smaller, devoid of its past splendour and the contrast between memory and reality becomes unsettling. Hirst comes to realise that the Shanghai of childhood exists only as an unreal space in her imagination: 'La mia ricerca del passato è solo la ricerca di un'utopia' (p. 350). The impossible search for an authentic place is also referred to in the Chinese legend of 'il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore' which she relates in *Blu Cina*, and which is also the title of one of her

[37] Daniel Boorstin, quoted in Culler, *The Semiotics of Tourism*, p. 158.
[38] Culler, *The Semiotics of Tourism*, p. 165.

previous books. This land beyond the peach blossom river is a mythical place of origins, an elusive utopia to which one can never return but for which one is forever searching.[39]

Whilst it may seem that even as an adult, Hirst is performing the role of a stereotype, this is an identity which she has chosen and which she uses to her advantage (to further her career in the fashion industry, for example), rather than one that has been imposed and which restricts her movement. There is, through a performative construction of cultural identity, a sense that she is gaining control over the process of identity, appropriating signs and manipulating them to create her own unique subject position. The synthesis of western and Chinese signs in the construction of her subjectivity represents an attempt to overcome the sense of estrangement and division that she had experienced as a child and to change some of the negative associations that can often go along with being identified as a person of mixed race. As she proposes in an interview with Massimo Morello: 'bisogna mescolarsi nella quotidianità con altre culture, meticciare di più. Bisogna dare a questo termine un significato positivo'.[40] This attempt by a biracial subject to transcend duality by creating a new position is akin to the *mestiza* consciousness advocated by Gloria Anzaldúa:

> In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. [...] The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. [41]

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[39] 'Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore' (*Blu Cina*, pp. 361-2) functions in a similar way to the island of Modok in Erminia Dell'Oro's *Asmara addio*. Both writers describe a journey in which they return to the area of their childhood, but are confronted with a place which does not correspond to the memories that they have built up over the years. They realise they are searching for an elusive place which no longer exists, or which exists only in their memory. Modok and the land beyond the peach blossom river are utopian spaces which represent an irretrievable past.

[40] Morello, 2006.

[41] Anzaldúa, p. 141.

CONCLUSION: THE LIMITS OF IDENTITY

What though, does Hirst consider to be the limits on the individual's performance of cultural identity? In *How To Do Things with Words* the marriage ceremony is the primary example that J. L. Austin provides as an illustration of the performative function of language. He insists however that a successful or felicitous outcome of a performative act is dependent on appropriate circumstances, social conventions and the actions of others.[42] As the action of *Blu Cina* moves between cultures, the interpretation and reception of performative acts is shown to change. In *Blu Cina*, the marriage ceremony between Baia Verde and 'Il Veneziano/Auspicio Felice', takes place under a Chinese ritual and as such the meaning of the ceremony is different for each participant. For the Italian, the marriage is not binding under Italian law and therefore when he leaves China, he is free to remarry in Italy. The situation, however, is different for Baia Verde as she is only free to remarry after the family hold a 'funeral' for their son-in-law in recognition of the finality of his departure. This is just one example of how different social conventions impinge upon the successful outcome of performative acts and how their interpretation depends on the social context in which they take place. This final section looks at three examples from Hirst's texts of cross-cultural code switching in which the performance of cultural identity is not successful: Firstly, the experience of American students in China, secondly, the example of Chinese students in Italy and lastly, Hirst's own experience in China.

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[42] Austin, pp. 5, 8, 14-15.

In *Cartoline da Pechino* Hirst relates the experience of two American teachers working in Beijing who attempt to 'go native' in order to be accepted within the local community:

> Si erano buttati in pieno nella vita cinese, vestendo come i nativi, mangiando come loro e adottando le loro abitudini. Contavano così di essere accettati più facilmente, ma a poco a poco hanno scoperto da certe espressioni del viso e da certi atteggiamenti dei cinesi che il loro comportamento non era gradito. (*Cartoline*, p. 83)

Their obvious differences mean that they will never be accepted as Chinese by the local community. On the contrary, their attempts to assimilate are received as an invasion of Chinese cultural territory, interpreted as an insult to their host country as they are assuming an identity to which they have no claim. The two students eventually revert to their Western lifestyle.

A similar event is described as occuring in Italy, this involving a female Chinese student's imitation of European styles of dress. She makes her own clothes based on the designs she sees in fashion magazines. This time, however, it is her fellow compatriots who reject her attempts to appear more European, accusing her of lacking pride in her Chinese cultural origins. They refer to her as '"la cinese di Milano": e questo per ricordarle che era sempre cinese, per quanto indossasse abiti italiani' (*Cartoline* p. 127). The local Chinese community in Milan underline that however much she tries to adopt Italian styles of dress, she is and will always be seen as a Chinese woman in Italy.

These two examples are clear cut: an American living in China, regardless of his or her attempts to speak, dress or behave in a Chinese manner, will never be considered Chinese by the local population and, likewise, a Chinese person living in Italy will not be considered Italian. The situation is less clear cut, however, for persons of mixed race as Hirst discovers in her journey back to China. She relates the experience of a group of

Chinese-American tourists in China. Despite not speaking any Chinese, and despite never having lived in China they are treated as Chinese and offered goods at Chinese rather than inflated tourist prices:

> Ma un Americano di origine cinese, vissuto a Boston negli Stati Uniti sin dalla nascita e che non parla il cinese non viene classificato come straniero. Io invece, nata in Cina e di madre cinese, vengo considerata a tutti gli effetti una straniera. (*Il mondo*, p. 17)

Even though these Americans with Chinese origins are not culturally competent in Chinese language or other matters, their physical similarity to other Chinese people means that they are interpreted as Chinese by the community. On the other hand, Hirst's experience as a biracial child is to be considered 'straniera in Cina e straniera in Italia' (p. 240).

Hirst is able to transcend the duality of her subjectivity by carving out a space for herself as a Chinese woman in Italy. Recognising that she will always be considered 'foreign' she uses her difference as an advantage. She uses several tactics including changing her name to Bamboo, adopting Chinese dress, performing Chinese culinary practices in order to accentuate her Chinese ethnicity. Yet these performances of cultural identity are aimed at a Western audience, in China she is not recognised as Chinese. Although her performance of Chinese ethnicity is largely successful in Europe, it fails in China as it is her bodily difference, rather than similarities that is used to classify her in each country. Her difference is inscribed on her body: her straight nose and wavy hair are read as western in China, but her dark hair and eyes are read as oriental in Europe. Cultural competencies, therefore unless they are performed by someone who is recognised as part of the community, will have only a limited effect.

Hirst's journey to Italy and return to China is a journey into self-consciousness in which she becomes aware of the ways and processes by which identities are formed. She

is able to escape imposed identities or 'recinti' by developing strategies to gain ownership over identity. Her awareness of the signifying practices which make up identity enable her to appropriate cultural signs in order to establish her own subject position. At the same time her writing shows a consciousness of the limits of identity, an awareness that the interpretation and reception of performative acts of identity depend upon culturally established frames of reference.

As Stuart Hall argues in the context of Caribbean cinema, retelling the past does not enable the rediscovery of a hidden, true self but is actually part of the process of identity construction.[43] Likewise, Hirst's journey back to China and the narration of her journey is an attempt to reconcile two halves of her identity, to unify her sense of self but instead it leads to a heightened awareness of the constructed nature of identity. Hirst realises as she wanders the streets of Shanghai that places, memories and identities are never fixed but are continually being transformed. There is no originary self prior to travel to be uncovered and Hirst eventually abandons the idea of finding this lost self: 'vedo uscire dal portone del Couvent la ragazza che ero' (p. 349). Textually too, *Blu Cina* can be seen as an attempt to create a coherent subjectivity by merging four separate texts into one complete autobiography. Yet, its very composition foregrounds the constructed nature of identity; the text and the subjectivity it represents are being written and rewritten and they too are in a constant state of flux. *Blu Cina*, the journey it relates, the places it describes, the subjectivity it represents and its own development as a text, highlight that identity, to paraphrase Stuart Hall, is about becoming as well as being; it is not an essence but a positioning.

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[43] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 222-37.

CHAPTER 4

Postmodern Pilgrims? The journeys through India of Sandra Petrignani, Francesca De Carolis and Alessandra Borghese

INTRODUCTION: THE ALLURE OF INDIA

The thesis so far has examined various forms of travel including colonial settlement in the writings of Erminia Dell'Oro, migration to the Americas in the work of Laura Pariani and others, and Bamboo Hirst's representation of moving between cultures and returning as a tourist to the land of her birth. In this chapter, I examine a different category of traveller and travelling activity. This form of travel involves a brief period of stay abroad and a fleeting encounter with another culture. It is, in some ways, related to tourism, although the writers I examine are all eager to distance themselves from the figure of the tourist and the pejorative connotations that the word evokes for them.

The texts that I have chosen all relate to journeys of varying length through India, a country that features strongly in the Italian popular imagination as a place of mysticism and with the strong allure of difference. As Gaia De Pascale claims, India in the mind of the European traveller represents 'la fame di esotismo, il desidero di ritorno alle origini, il sogno di una regressione nella culla del mondo'.[1] This is perhaps a result of previous writings by prominent authors such as Guido Gozzano, Alberto Moravia, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Giorgio Manganelli and Antonio Tabucchi in whose writings India is frequently portrayed as both intoxicating and exotic.[2] The three texts on which I focus in this chapter all represent recent journeys to India and they foreground the spiritual

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[1] De Pascale, p. 186. See pp. 186-202 for an overview of writings on India, including those by Gozzano, Moravia, Pasolini and Manganelli.

[2] See Guido Gozzano, *Verso la cuna del mondo*; Alberto Moravia, *Un'idea dell'India*; Pier Paolo Pasolini, *L'odore dell'India*; Giorgio Manganelli, *Esperimento con l'India* (Milan: Adelphi, 1992): See pp. 12-13 of this thesis.

and/or religious facet of the travellers' identity. Sandra Petrignani, Francesca De Carolis and Alessandra Borghese are, in different ways, involved in a search for spiritual fulfilment by means of an investigation of the religious dimension of the space through which they travel. Their journeys thus combine travel for pleasure with what amounts to an explicitly articulated religious quest; they therefore prompt an exploration of the relationship between different manifestations of travel including pilgrimage, mass tourism and a more personal, individualised journey. As the chapter will demonstrate, these accounts of travel through India involve reconfiguring the search for religious belief within the context of a postmodern encounter.

Sandra Petrignani is indisputably the most prominent of the writers discussed here. She was born in Piacenza in 1952 and is a literary critic, novelist and journalist who has worked for the Rome-based daily newspaper, *Il Messaggero*, and the weekly magazine *Panorama*.[3] Her works include *Navigazioni di Circe* (1987) which was awarded the Elsa Morante prize; *Il catalogo dei giocattoli* (1988) and *Care Presenze* (2004). *Ultima India*, an account of the author's journey through India in 1994, was originally published in 1996 by Baldini and Castoldi. The 2006 version, published by Neri Pozza, won an award in the travel writing category of the 2007 Premio Fregene. Petrignani's journey through India is an attempt to immerse herself in the religious culture of the places she visits and is structured around a series of visits to sites of religious significance including Hindu and Buddhist temples, holy cities, and educational institutions where she observes religious ceremonies and participates in traditional rites. The narrative itself focuses on particular moments of emotional intensity rather than providing any systematic or chronological account of the journey whilst India itself is represented through poetic and

[3] See Panizza & Wood p. 322 and Wood, p. 261.

evocative descriptions of landscape. It relates numerous exchanges with Indian spiritual leaders, religious devotees and western travellers which tend to centre on the meaning of human existence and the pursuit of happiness. The subject matter thus leads to a deeply introspective narrative, although Petrignani's scepticism towards organised religion is revealed in hints of irony and humour and in the form that the narrative assumes.

Francesca De Carolis was born in 1956 in Santa Maria Capua Vetere (Caserta) and graduated in political science at the University of Naples. She is another journalist and photographer living in Rome, who has collaborated with *Il Messaggero* and *Il Mattino* and she currently works for Tg1. Her travelogue, *India: appunti di viaggio* (2004) was awarded a special prize at the 2005 Palestrina Albatros awards, the only literary festival in Italy dedicated to travel writing. It is a series of reflections on a trip around northern India in which she visits New Delhi, Jodhpur, Jaiphur and Varanasi. Although her book is less overtly concerned with the search for an understanding of religious belief than that of Petrignani, De Carolis too is involved in a search for meaning which is prompted by disenchantment with her own society. She is also attracted to the mystical side of India and is unable to ignore the spiritual significance of the places she visits. Her other works include *I giochi della cometa* (1986) and *Maritè* (1995).

Alessandra Borghese (otherwise known as Donna Alessandra Romana dei Principi Borghese) was born in Rome in 1963 into one of Italy's most prominent aristocratic families. After obtaining her degree in business administration from the John Cabot University of Rome, she moved to New York where she lived and worked for three years.[4] Following a brief marriage to the son of a Greek ship-owner, she returned to Italy and subsequently founded the *Centro Culturale Alessandra Borghese* where she

[4] See Alessandra Borghese's Home Page <http://www.alessandraborghese.it> [accessed 2 August 2007]

organised art exhibitions and other cultural events. She has worked as Vatican reporter for *Panorama*, and written articles for *Il Tempo* newspaper and *Gente* and *Style* magazines. As her writing indicates, Catholicism is central to both her family history and her sense of self. Her family has strong ties to the papacy as one of her ancestors, Camillo Borghese (1550-1621) was elected Pope Paul V. She relates her personal journey of conversion to Catholicism in *Con occhi nuovi* and *Sete di Dio*.[5] Metaphors of travel permeate her religious writing: religion is described as 'il cammino spirituale', whilst the Church acts as her guide and the saints are her 'compagni di strada' (*Occhi*, p. 87). These two texts document an emotional journey of faith, while her later writings are accounts of geographical travel to India, Germany and France. The text on which I wish to concentrate in this chapter, *Ritorno in India: diario di viaggio* (2006), is an account of a journey through southern India. It is also an investigation into Catholicism in India, and as such is also a journey into the heart of her own sense of self. The prominent role that religion and pilgrimage play in her travels is most evident in *Sulle tracce di Joseph Ratzinger*, which has been described as 'un pellegrinaggio che ripercorre le tappe della vita di Joseph Ratzinger nella terra natale', and her forthcoming work *Lourdes*.[6]

Though each text clearly possesses distinctive individual features, notably in the narrative style that they each adopt and in their respective portrayals of the first person, they nevertheless share a certain commonality of interest in the traveller's desire to experience some form of intense contact with the example of Hindu mysticism that they encounter. The search for an enhanced understanding of religious identity figures

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[5] Alessandra Borghese, *Con occhi nuovi* (Casale Monferrato, AL: Piemme, 2004); *Sete di Dio* (Casale Monferrato, AL: Piemme, 2006).

[6] Alessandra Borghese, *Sulle tracce di Joseph Ratzinger* (Siena: Cantagalli, 2007); *Lourdes* (Mondadori, forthcoming). See 'Recensione: Sulle tracce di Joseph Ratzinger, Alessandra Borghese', *Agenzia Fides* <http://www.fides.org/ita/recensioni/2007/borghese_0207.html> [accessed 2 August 2007]

strongly in the writings of these three women and is one of the main motivations for their journey. The encounter with another culture inevitably involves confronting an alternative way of seeing the world and a different way of conceptualising reality. It frequently involves confronting religious differences, not just because the cultural practice of religion shapes the everyday lives of many individuals across the globe, but also because religious discourse is one of the central ways through which human beings attempt to understand the world and their place within it. It could be argued that the very questions that religion attempts to address concerning the meaning of personal existence, the question of interaction with others and the behaviour of the collectivity are, in many ways, similar to those raised by travel. The encounter with various systems of belief in India, for example the concepts of reincarnation and predestination, uncovers very different responses to these basic questions. It thus presents a challenge to common notions of personal identity and agency in the mind of the western traveller.

Travel has a long history of association with the quest for religious or spiritual enlightenment. Medieval pilgrimages consisted of journeys to holy sites in far away places as a performance of religious devotion and a desire for contact with the sacred. Later, missionary journeys involved an attempt to spread Christian beliefs and practices to Europe's newly colonised nations. Many present-day journeys likewise include visits to churches, religious shrines and other holy sites, motivated by religious devotion, a desire for healing, or simple curiosity. Nowadays, religious tourism is big business: the site of Padre Pio's tomb has become one of the most visited Catholic shrines in the world and the small village of San Giovanni Rotondo has been transformed by tourism.

Even the Vatican has founded its own charter air service to transport pilgrims to religious sites around the world. [7]

Even when religious motivations are not at the forefront of the journey, contemporary travel practices can be said to share certain features with pilgrimages. Indeed, scholars such as Dean MacCannell, Rob Shields and Victor Turner have drawn parallels between the two activities: tourists frequently follow a fixed itinerary in which their goal is to see sights which have already been marked as worthy of attention, where they pay homage to a certain place or monument and hope to obtain some sort of uplifting experience as a result. Even the tourist practice of souvenir shopping has been likened to the collection of religious relics.[8] Dean MacCannell regards tourists as secular pilgrims in search of authenticity in far away places.[9] Rob Shields likewise points to the pilgrim-like aspects of tourism in his discussion of honeymooning couples at Niagara:

> The trip to Niagara Falls was analogous to a medieval pilgrimage. Like their medieval counterparts, the pilgrims to Niagara anticipated a difficult and possibly dangerous passage which would be rewarded at the end by their arrival at a shrine or place where their world achieved a connection with a timeless essence.[10]

Recognising the structural affinities between religious journeys and tourism, Erik Cohen refers to modern pilgrims as part-time tourists, whilst Turner & Turner assert that 'a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist'.[11] James Clifford prefers the term pilgrimage when referring to contemporary travel practices as, he claims, it avoids the

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[7] Tom Kington, 'Vatican Plans Airway to Heaven', *The Guardian*, 15 August 2007: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/airlines/story/0,,2148948,00.html> [accessed 27 August 2007]

[8] Judy Cohen, 'The Contemporary Tourist: Is Everything Old New Again?', in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Volume 29 (2002), pp. 31-35 (p. 34).

[9] Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999; 1st edn 1976), see in particular chapter 5, 'Staged Authenticity', pp. 91-107.

[10] Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 149.

[11] Erik Cohen, *Contemporary Tourism: Diversity and Change* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2004), p. 30. Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 20.

travel/tourism dichotomy. The anthropologist Victor Turner considered pilgrimage to be a 'liminoid' phenomenon as it shares many aspects with rites of passage, involving a voluntary distancing from mundane social structures, a movement from a familiar to a far-away place, and return after having undergone some form of personal change or transition. He suggests extending the anthropological study of pilgrimage to 'literary narratives in which the hero or heroine goes on a long journey to find out who he or she really is outside structure'.[12] The journeys discussed in this chapter incorporate aspects of tourism and pilgrimage in that they are voluntary, temporary journeys through a country which satisfies a desire for diversity and change, but at the same time they are also a quest for transcendent meaning.[13] Erik Cohen describes this mode of travel as existential, drawing on the religious connotations of the word recreation: 'By encountering Reality, he [sic] also discovers his real self and meaning in his life; he is reborn or "re-created" at the center, like the prototypical pilgrim.'[14]

The notion of the journey as creating or re-creating the person is also the basis of Zygmunt Bauman's reflections on pilgrimage as the embodiment of identities in modernity. Pilgrimage, he argues, is an exercise in self-construction and pilgrims are identity builders. Their journey is a structured progression towards a fixed point with the aim of constructing a solid identity. Postmodernism, in contrast, is embodied by the life strategies of the vagabond, the tourist and the player all of whom seek to avoid permanent attachments to people or places. They eschew fixed identities in order to keep

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[12] Victor Turner, 'The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal', in *History of Religions*, 12: 191-230 (p. 204).
[13] Erik Cohen defines a tourist as 'a voluntary, temporary traveller, travelling in the expectation of pleasure from the novelty and change experienced on a relatively long and non-recurrent round-trip' (p. 23).
[14] Erik Cohen, p. 90.

their options open.[15] This chapter shows how reading the journeys of Petrignani, De Carolis and Borghese as forms of contemporary pilgrimage can shed light on their respective approaches towards identity. It examines the structure of the journey that they each undertake, its motivations, the nature of India that is uncovered, or rather constructed, and the modes of representation that are employed in their accounts. It also considers how far the travellers can be said to have achieved their aim of spiritual fulfilment through a meaningful encounter with the other culture.

THE MOTIVATION OF THE JOURNEY

As previously discussed, all of the writers with whom I am concerned are engaged on an individual journey that is in some way related to a search for a religious identity and enlightenment. But it is perhaps worth bearing in mind a point that Judy Cohen makes concerning motivation in her work on the medieval pilgrimage: in her view the religious quest was only the most overt motive for the medieval pilgrimage, other motives included escape from the mundane, the desire for adventure, prestige and regression.[16] Cohen argues that despite the varying popularity of different forms of travel throughout the ages, the motivations behind the journeys remain remarkably similar. It is in the light of these observations that I wish to interrogate the impetus behind the journeys of Petrignani, De Carolis and Borghese to show how this search is prompted by a sense of alienation from their own culture. At the same time, each of these travel accounts portrays travel in terms of a personal quest for origins or authenticity in a world which is seen as increasingly under threat from homogenizing influence of global economic forces.

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[15] Bauman, pp. 18-36.
[16] Judy Cohen, pp. 31-32.

The search for spiritual fulfilment underlies all the encounters that Petrignani makes in her journey through India. In his discussion of the origins of the term, Richard King claims that mysticism in academic discourse has been used to define religious knowledge gained by means of an extraordinary experience or revelation of the divine, a sense of union with the Absolute, an experience that transcends the sensory realm.[17] Petrignani seeks out places and people which she thinks might facilitate this extra-sensory phenomenon. Aside from the numerous temples and shrines she visits, she has a private audience with the Swami Nagananda, stays in the holy city of Varanasi, watches the *kathakali* dance inside a Hindu temple, visits the birthplace of the philosopher Shankara, meets with the president of the Theosophical Society, tours the Krishnamurti foundation and speaks with members of the community of the city of Auroville, founded in 1968 and intended to represent the ideal city.

Petrignani never hides the motivation of her journey from her reader. At the beginning of *Ultima India*, she writes of the trip as a personal quest for meaning and spirituality: 'Sì è vero, sto cercando. L'Uno-Senza-Secondo. O come chiamarlo? L'Assoluto? Ciò il cui centro è ovunque e la circonferenza da nessuna parte' (*Ultima*, pp. 10-11). Her hesitation as to how to name the entity that she is seeking can be read as an attempt to avoid the cultural connotations of the term 'god' and to distance herself from institutionalised religion with its fixed interpretation of the divine. Her journey is a personal search for transcendent meaning rather than an investigation of one specific religious belief system. The sense of the journey as an interrogation of the nature of selfhood and this conceptualization of the journey is compounded by the words of a

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[17] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 7, 15.

professor of Sanskrit that Petrignani meets at the Institute for Tibetan studies at Sarnath on the outskirts of Varanasi. When Petrignani comments that she had not found the sense of peace that she expected in the holy city of Varanasi, the professor reflects on the travel as an interior journey: 'Roma, Sarnath, Varanasi: il cambiamento è interiore. L'India di per sé non può dare molto a chi non compie intimamente una sua personale e segreta rivoluzione' (*Ultima*, p. 44). The journey is thus presented as both an exterior journey and an interior, psychological one, during which the traveller hopes to undergo some sort of personal transformation through the encounter with the sacred sites of India and the interpretation of their significance that the traveller gains from talking to those associated with them.

As we have seen before, introspection is associated with memory and Petrignani links her journey through India with events that occurred in childhood. Still in Sarnath, she meets a monk who proposes that religious faith no longer exists and that humans are motivated principally by money. Whilst reflecting on what it means to believe, Petrignani describes religion in terms of a journey along a path that she had abandoned in dher youth:

> Avrei voluto rincorrerlo e chiedergli: "Allora, dimmi, credere che cos'è?" Ma sapevo abbastanza di anima per non farmi illusioni. Ecco qualcosa che nessuno può spiegarti, tutt'al più può indicarti una via. E quella a me era già stata indicata; ne avevo percorso un pezzo brevissimo, abbastanza da capire quanto fosse impervia. Abbastanza da avere voglia di abbandonarla. (*Ultima*, p. 49)

Her rejection of Catholicism as a belief system and way of life leads to the search for spiritual fulfilment in another culture and an indication that she finds it difficult to situate herself within the strict boundaries of any one religious creed.

Though Borghese's account of her journey to India is in almost every respect different from that of Petrignani, her discussion of the motivations that underlie travel

does show the transformative potential of journeying to a distant place: 'Ci sono viaggi che possono cambiare una persona in profondità' (*Ritorno*, p. 12). Travel is again referred to as an exploration of the self, a 'provocazione interiore' during which the traveller's self-perception is challenged by an encounter with an alternative social reality (*Ritorno*, p. 13). The liberating effect of travel is emphasised by a comparison with the state of dreaming in which the individual is not bound by conventions of normal life: 'Viaggiare è un po' come sognare, un abbandonarsi all'ignoto per scoprire nuovi spazi e assaporare l'odore della libertà' (*Ritorno*, p. 12). And finally, travel provides the opportunity to encounter and understand difference, which serves to illuminate aspects of the self: 'Per questo uno degli aspetti più interessanti del viaggiare sta proprio nello sforzo di capire l'altro, il diverso. Più ci sforziamo in questo senso più arriviamo a conoscere noi stessi' (*Ritorno*, p. 14).

One of the main reasons, however, that Borghese is attracted to India lies in its significance as a meeting place for different religious belief systems. She remarks on the pervasiveness of religion in the country, described as the 'senso religioso che trasuda ovunque' (*Ritorno*, p. 57). Religion clearly structures her journey through India as it defines the way she perceives herself and the interpretation of India that she offers. *Ritorno in India* contains constant references to herself as a believer, including details of her meetings with Pope John Paul II, and Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI. Borghese too approaches her discussion of religion through the metaphor of travel. Her conversion to Catholicism is described as her most important journey and the encounter with God as her most significant encounter (*Ritorno*, p. 14). Almost all her conversations with the people she meets in India revolve around religious faith, whilst the places she visits are predominantly Catholic churches and other sites of worship. The

people she encounters are defined by their religious affiliation. Her driver, for example, is presented as 'Shafi, il nostro autista musulmano' (*Ritorno*, p. 40). The detailed description that she gives of the contents of her suitcase including the religious paraphernalia she takes with her serves as a symbol of the cultural baggage which renders her encounter with Indian religions problematic. It belies her claim that she travels with an open mind and light heart, without prejudice or preconceptions (*Ritorno*, pp. 23-4). Indeed, she uses baggage as a metaphor when discussing what she hopes to obtain from the encounter with another religious culture:

> Mi piacerebbe riuscire a captare e a capire senza disagio i lati migliori di questo popolo e della sua cultura. [...] Entrare in un'altra cultura vuol dire arricchire il proprio bagaglio di conoscenza e di emozioni, non significa perdere la propria identità. (*Ritorno*, p. 60)

It is clear from this passage, that unlike Petrignani, Borghese is not seeking to be changed by her journey through India. The potential for travel to effect any major transformation in subjectivity is limited by her unwavering sense of religious identity. Travel is instead a confirmation and performance of her existing religious belief system. It is the Christian aspect of India that she is most interested in exploring and the spiritual connection that she achieves in India is provided by contact with Catholicism in India: she attends the Cathedral of St. Thomas near Chennai, St. Joseph's on the road to Pondicherry, the church of Madonna of Lourdes near Periyar, and St. Maria's in Madurai, amongst others. Throughout her journey, despite her insistence that all religions are pathways to God, she consistently approaches India through Christian frames of reference. Even the title of the account of her religious conversion, *Con occhi nuovi*, indicates that her religion framework impacts upon the way she approaches and perceives reality.

As a result of her firmly held convictions, the encounter with difference in India is, at times, emotionally distressing. In contrast to Petrignani, Borghese feels at ease within the Catholic churches she visits, as they recreate the comforting familiarity of home and provide a welcome refuge from the chaos of India's streets. In the Basilica of St. Thomas in Chennai, she remarks: 'Sento aria di casa e di cose conosciute' (*Ritorno*, p. 35). This experience provides a direct contrast with her response to the Hindu temple at Kanchipuram where she relates: 'Provo una fortissima sensazione di disagio. Tutto è così diverso da quello a cui sono abituata. Più che attirarmi, mi respinge' (*Ritorno*, p. 37). Reflecting on her experiences in a series of Hindu temples, Borghese admits to feeling 'un senso quasi di repugnanza', 'una sorta di oppressione minacciosa' and likens the encounter with Indian religions as being catapulted into a carnival procession of gods, suggesting that she sees these religions as providing some form of entertaining masquerade but having no substantive value (*Ritorno*, pp. 55-56). She admits to closing her eyes during a Hindu religious ceremony as she doesn't know how to behave, again an indication that she is not open to this experience. Rather than the journey provoking an interrogation of religious understanding and a willingness to be changed by the encounter with India, the comparison with the religious cultures of India only serves to reinforce her Catholic faith.

De Carolis too frames her journey as a personal search for meaning. The notion of the journey being an individual enquiry into the self is suggested by the subtitle of her travelogue: 'Un invito a dimenticare il tempo e a cercare la "propria" India'. Her journey too is structured around a series of visits to Hindu and Buddhist temples, the holy cities of Varanasi and Pushkar, and what is arguably one of the most famous shrines in the world, the Taj Mahal. De Carolis also comments on the sense of spirituality that seems

to pervade India: 'Nulla cancella dal cuore la sensazione di vicinanza con il mondo dello spirito' (*Appunti*, p. 54, see also p. 60). Like Petrignani, there is implicit acknowledgement that she has something to learn from this culture and a desire to be changed by it. The narrative is therefore a quest for internal understanding as well as external exploration of a distant location.

THE CULTURE OF ORIGIN

There is an awareness in the writings of both Petrignani and De Carolis that travel has the potential to reveal aspects of the self that were not immediately apparent back home. Petrignani comments on the ability of travel to unsettle the traveller's sense of self through the figure of Marc, an English businessman whom she meets at the airport in Mumbai. Marc feels uncomfortable with the poverty that surrounds him in India and can't wait to leave India for the pristine beaches of Dubai. India seems to provoke feelings of guilt and he admits: 'Forse è questo che non mi piace dell'India, perché mi rivela per quello che sono e non vorrei essere' (*Ultima*, p. 83). What one witnesses here is the traveller identifying in part with the person to whom she is speaking. A dialogue is represented which is also a form of self-questioning. Similarly, De Carolis notes the ability that travel through India has to provoke self-reflection: 'E' faticoso guardare in faccia il mondo, guardarsi in faccia ad ogni momento' (*Appunti*, p. 31). Here, De Carolis experiences the disquieting effect of recognising the self in the other as the tourist's gaze is refracted back to reveal hidden flaws within the western traveller.

Travel not only reveals the hidden and perhaps disconcerting aspects of the self; it also enables a reflection on the state of one's own culture and society. For these travellers to India, the journey is both prompted by, and gives rise to, feelings of

disillusionment with western/Italian society. In a similar vein, Turner & Turner point to the fact that pilgrimages involved a desire to escape from profane social structures and 'occasions of sin'.[18] All three women are united in their presentation of Italian society as increasingly secular, self-absorbed, and decadent.

It is religion that provides the focal point for the travellers' criticism of western societies. In *Ultima India*, Petrignani provides firstly a series of criticisms about the lack of faith in her society and secondly a rejection of the notion of faith that her society offers. She tells her driver: 'Vengo dal regno della libertà da dio' (*Ultima*, p. 12) and that in her culture 'Dio è morto' (*Ultima*, p. 13). She claims that Italians are too preoccupied with mundane affairs that they have no time to reflect on the deeper meanings of life: 'La gente teme di ingrassare, d'innamorarsi, di fallire, teme di essere imbrogliata, di essere derubata, teme di ammalarsi' (*Ultima*, p. 13). She reproaches Italian society for its lack of attention to spirituality, yet she does not recognise herself within the religious belief system that her culture provides. Her travels through India are an attempt to fill this void, but the contact with Indian religions only serves to confirm her rejection of Catholicism. This rejection is developed through several comparisons between eastern religions and Christianity. When Petrignani observes the *kathakali* performance in the temple/theatre of Kalamandalam, she is fascinated by the god Shiva. This dancing god seems to embody the differences between Hinduism and Catholicism: the vitality and abandon of Shiva versus the sterility of Christianity with its focus on temperance. She exclaims: 'Voglio anch'io un dio danzante anziché un dio crocefisso' (*Ultima*, p. 12). The crucifix reinforces Christianity's associations with sacrifice and death and is a further comment on the decline of religion in secular western societies. She later

[18] Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, p. 7.

contrasts the figure of the saint with the gurus and religious leaders in India, arguing that whilst the former lead an austere life of suffering, the latter are often philosophers and intellectuals: 'I nostri santi sono sostanzialmente dei poveri cristi, dei disgraziati: martiri divorati dai leoni, ragazze uccise per scampare a uno stupro, monache anoressiche' (*Ultima*, p. 100). The scornful tone underscores what Petrignani sees as the futility of such actions and the lack of appeal that Catholicism holds out to her. Whilst Catholicism, she argues, is linked to self-denial, guilt and martyrdom, Eastern religions centre on personal fulfilment.

Petrignani's feelings towards religion are revealed in one particularly intense moment when she offers some biscuits to a stray dog. She immediately feels shame for having indulged a wretched animal in a country in which she is surrounded by so much human suffering. She is so overwhelmed by guilt that she cannot watch him eat and she describes herself as scuttling away without even entering the temple that she had come to visit. These emotions, she suggests, are the product of a religious culture which focuses on guilt and judgement: 'Ma ora so che Vishnu, tanto diverso dal dio cattolico, però come lui incolpevole di tutti gli orrori, eternamente distratto, non mi avrebbe giudicata. Mi avrebbe semplicemente compresa nel suo sogno' (*Ultima*, p. 35). She concludes that the Hindu God would have taken her act for what it was, a spontaneous gesture of compassion.

A further comparison between religion in Italy and India is found in Petrignani's assessment of pilgrimage in which she condemns the commodification of religion. She argues that whilst pilgrims to Lourdes or Pietrelcina are seeking a cure for an illness or resolution of a problem, the quest for spirituality in India represents a search for truth and illumination (*Ultima*, p. 100). Petrignani's investigation of religious belief in India

therefore leads more to an internal investigation of what she finds problematic within Christianity. She reveals herself to be uncomfortable with her own religious culture based on judgement and punishment, suffering and sacrifice. In the course of her journey there is an outright rejection of all organised religions, and their associated rituals, as her journey becomes a personal quest for meaning rather than a search for absolute truth.

Borghese makes many similar observations on the state of religious belief in Italy in her discussions with her driver. She claims that although people in Italy have more material possessions, they are more likely to complain and do not appear as contented as people in India (*Ritorno*, p. 49). She too accuses her own society of having lost its sense of spirituality: 'L'argomento "anima" è diventato quasi di esclusivo dominio orientale, perché, ahimè, in Occidente sembra non esserci più il tempo per certe cose appartentemente "superflue"' (*Ritorno*, p. 18). Borghese, however, finds the answer in her Catholic faith and condemns people who seek religion elsewhere without having first explored the belief system that their own culture has to offer. For Borghese, the search for exoticism in eastern religions is a passing fad and further evidence of the commodification of religious belief.

In her previous work too, Borghese points to the decline of religion in western societies: 'L'Europa vive oggi una sottile angoscia, la paura che la sua identità, che ha come collante il cristianesimo (anche se non si è voluto riconoscerlo) si sfaldi' (*Occhi*, p. 162). Religion is portrayed as a cohesive force which binds identities, both personal and national. She claims that Europe is suffering from an identity crisis precisely because it has lost its sense of religious faith (*Ritorno*, p. 103). The churches she visits in India, however, are packed full with worshippers. The future for Christianity, she suggests, is to be found in India, as this is a place in which religious belief is still at the centre of

daily life. She also points to the possibility of the West being re-evangelised by Christian missionaries from the East.

Both Petrignani and Borghese distance themselves from their culture of origin. Petrignani does so because she rejects the belief system that her society offers, whilst Borghese bemoans the decline of faith in Italy and the increasing secularisation of society. Their attempts to place distance between themselves and the culture from which they emerge is also evidenced in their antipathy towards groups of western tourists with their criticisms tending to focus on the outward appearance of westerners. In a rather essentialising description of Indians, Borghese compares the elegance of their dress to contemporary fashions in Italy: 'Una qualsiasi ragazza indiana che si incontra per strada, è più elegante di una occidentale in jeans con l'ombellico di fuori' (*Ritorno*, p. 32). De Carolis too focuses on the physical appearance of western tourists, who come to embody the failures of western society. They are presented as old, fat and vulgar, in contrast to the dignity of Indians. She draws analogies between the advancing years of the tourists she encounters in India which come to represent nothing less than the decline of western civilization:

> Pelle arrossata, capelli tinti, gambe larghe, muscoli flaccidi, visi sudati. Un fare trasbordante e grasso. Autorizzato forse dall'essere in vacanza. Ma non è questo. Non è solo questo. Ecco: troppe facce appassite, e forse lo è anche la mia. (*Appunti*, p. 70)

The ageing years of these tourists prompt a reflection on the values of Italian society and its problems of *denatalità*: 'Abituati come siamo a orrizonti popolati di anziani, abbiamo ormai dimenticato cosa sia un paese affollato della vita dei bambini' (*Appunti*, p. 35). In these comments, De Carolis draws on Orientalist discourses of fecundity of the East, but, importantly, the negative connotations are reversed and her description of India turns into a criticism of her own society. Similarly, the prosperity of western tourists is

turned into a critique of western consumerism and the rise and fall of civilizations is represented as a journey which is nearing its end. The tourists provide an image of: 'un mondo in disfacimento, ormai al capolinea. In giro per la Terra a spendere i suoi volgari spiccioli' (*Appunti*, p. 70).

The feeling towards Italy that is provoked in De Carolis by her journey to India is further revealed in her descriptions of Rome when she returns to Italy. She presents a city of monotony and indifference compared with the vitality of India. There are no children in the street; no animals disrupting the flow of traffic. Her account concludes with images of death and decay on a cold, grey February morning in Rome:

> Tutto sembra pervaso da un'aria grigia che nonostante il sole opprime ogni cosa. Come un'assenza di desiderio di vita, in questo mondo che pure rifugge con orrore l'idea della morte.
>
> Ecco, nella fotografia di un viale di città, imbalsamato nella luce opaca di un mattino di febbraio, l'Occidente che va a morire. Sembra tutto così pulito, così triste, raggelante. Non si sentono rumori, né odori, né buoni né cattivi. Non si vede neanche un bambino. Né vivo né morto.
>
> Non c'è neppure una mucca per strada. (*Appunti*, p. 86)

She portrays an inanimate city, preserved in a state of limbo between life and death and seems to suggest that, in trying to insulate itself against dirt, death and disease, the western world has failed to grasp the meaning of life.

THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY:

According to MacCannell and Cohen, it is tourists' alienation with their own society that spurs them to seek authenticity elsewhere.[19] As Erik Cohen argues: 'The alienated modern tourist in quest of authenticity hence looks for the pristine, the primitive, the natural, that which is as yet untouched by modernity.'[20] The journeys of these three women can also be understood as a search for authenticity, which is configured in various ways in their writing as a search for the 'real' India, a search for unity, origins or

[19] MacCannell, p. 91; Erik Cohen, p. 7.
[20] Erik Cohen, p. 103.

happiness. As the title *Ultima India* suggests, Petrignani's journey is tinged with nostalgia and an anxiety of belatedness. She is searching for an India that is untouched by modernity and progress: 'Qualcuno mi aveva detto sbrigati, altrimenti non la troverai più, anche l'India sta cambiando, diventerà come il resto del mondo; [...] se vai adesso, forse fai ancora in tempo a vedere l'India per l'ultima volta. L'India' (*Ultima*, p. 10). Petrignani's search for the 'real' India is evidenced in her desire to see 'behind the scenes' of the places that she visits rather than being content with events and places that are staged for tourist consumption. [21] In the opening chapter, Petrignani expresses her desire to visit a temple in order to watch the *kathakali*, a Hindu dance-drama, which in its traditional form extends from dusk to dawn. She insists on seeing this dance in an actual temple, rather than in a theatre as she wants to see the 'real' dance and not a tourist performance: 'Volevo vedere il kathakali nel tempio, non a teatro dove mi aveva portato. Volevo vedere il *vero* kathakali' (*Ultima*, p. 10).

For Petrignani, travel to a country such as India seems to represent a means of travelling back in time. As Curtis & Pajaczkowska argue: 'Much of the excitement in travel is in outrunning "time's winged chariot" and the forces of modernity.'[22] Petrignani later expresses her dislike of Mumbai as its skyscrapers remind her too much of New York: 'manca solo la statua della Libertà' (*Ultima*, p. 154). Through her rejection of Bombay, she articulates one of the main anxieties of the contemporary traveller: if one of the main reasons for travel is to experience difference, then what is the point of leaving home if the whole world looks the same? Bombay, she claims is no longer

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[21] On staged authenticity and the tourist's desire to access the back regions of other societies see MacCannell, pp. 91-107.

[22] Barry Curtis and Claire Pajaczkowska, '"Getting There": Travel, Time and Narrative', in *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, ed. by George Robertson and others (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 199-215 (p. 202).

representative of the real India as there are no cows roaming in the busy streets: 'Un'India senza le vacche che circolano libere e insolenti non è abbastanza India' (*Ultima* p. 159). Her desire for authenticity involves a rejection of progress and modernisation in favour of a more primitive, natural way of life, yet this ignores the realities of present-day India, as the India she is seeking has perhaps already disappeared.

Borghese also searches for difference in a world in which differences of class and culture seem to be disappearing. She frames her journey by departure from Rome and, as she glances around the airport, she remarks that travel is no longer the preserve of a privileged elite. Although on one hand she welcomes this, yet at the same time she expresses regret at the levelling out of difference: 'Siamo tutti omologati per essere casual, comodi e globali' (*Ritorno*, p. 26). India thus represents a place of difference in an increasingly homogeneous world.

Borghese's search for an authentic India is expressed in her desire to immerse herself fully in this new culture, without the need for guide books and without the protection of a tour group. She rejects travel within:

> Un gruppo omogeneo che ti protegge e che, però, in qualche modo, ti isola dall'ambiente. Mi sono voluta buttare da sola e in fretta per le vie dell'India, immergere totalmente in quella zona di Paese che avevo deciso di vedere, prevedendo lunghe tappe e molti luoghi da visitare. (*Ritorno*, pp. 56-57)

Her search for authenticity is also manifest in her dislike of tourists, touched upon in the previous section. She insists that she is not a backpacker or a tourist, instead she seeks a personalised experience which permits direct contact with the culture through which she travels.

De Carolis too tries to distinguish herself from groups of tourists, although she often finds herself visiting the same sights. Her disdain for tourists is evidenced in her choice of vocabulary as she twice refers to them as being 'vomited' out of tour buses:

> Compaiono piuttosto a frotte vomitati all'improvviso dalle bocche di grandi Pullman a ridosso dei monumenti più famosi, dei centri commericali, dei ristoranti con menu e sfondi ideati appositamente per loro. (*Appunti,* p. 69)

According to De Carolis then, these tourists do not see the real India, eat real Indian food, or buy real Indian goods in real Indian shops. In her critique of tourists she is positioning herself as a more discerning traveller whose individualised journey enables a closer, more authentic encounter with the country.

The travellers' search for authenticity in India extends to a desire to exert some sort of control over the reading experience. The various narrative techniques that the writers adopt, and the presence or absence of certain paratextual elements are designed to make the account appear more 'authentic' to the reader. De Carolis extends an invitation to the reader to accompany her on the trip to India. She attempts to alter the pace of reading in order to signal entry into a different culture and to provide a more authentic sense of the place she describes. The text is therefore prefaced by a list of instructions referred to as 'indicatori stradali per agevolmente viaggiare dentro il libro'. They consist of notes telling the reader to pause when there is a comma and to take a medium to long pause at a full stop. De Carolis wants the reader to adapt to the rhythms of India, to read at a slower pace, which allows for reflection. She repeats 'L'India non vuole fretta' (*Appunti*, pp. 14, 18).

In a further attempt to create an authentic text, *Ritorno in India* is printed on lined paper as if it were a series of extracts from a notepad, whilst chapter titles appear in a handwritten font. It is therefore presented as a series of spontaneous notes written at the

time of the journey, rather than a text that has been reworked and edited before publication. The text also contains a hand-drawn map of India, rudimentary sketches of scenes from the narrative, photographs and even copies of receipts from the journey. This further contributes to the realistic quality of the text by substantiating her travelling tales with documentary evidence.

Petrignani's attempt to recreate India as an exotic place is, on the other hand, characterised by the absence of features which usually structure the reading of a travel account. Unlike the other writers, she offers no index of the places she visits, provides no map for reference; there are no headings or numbers to the chapters, and there is no signposting within the narrative to indicate the route that she intends to take. The narration does not follow a chronological pattern and neither is it framed and staged by departure from Italy. The disruption of linear time and absence of spatial references are perhaps an attempt to capture the sense of a different kind of time operating in India and to provide a perception of a culture where rigid delineation of space is not important.

A further thread that runs through the narratives of Petrignani and De Carolis and motivates the journey is a desire for unity. This is also closely related to questions of religion and authenticity and is expressed as a wish to be reunited with lost origins, a desire for completeness with the divine, a healing of division between mind, soul and body, or a return to some form of primordial state, a 'unity of self which preceded adulthood and modern self-consciousness'.[23]

For Petrignani, her journey seems to lead to a more immediate and intimate form of relationship with the people she meets. She strikes up a friendship with Gilberto and Antonio, two Italian travellers that she meets en route. When they eventually go their

[23] Curtis and Pajaczkowska, p. 199.

separate ways, they embrace each other as if they were old friends and Petrignani declares: 'Mi sembra di fare un salto indietro nel tempo, quando gli altri non erano mai degli estranei, ma solo compresi o non compresi in un gruppo di appartenenza' (*Ultima*, p. 59). She therefore presents the journey through India as a journey back in time to some primitive origin before rupture between self and other. Petrignani also configures her search for spirituality as a return to origins, in this case the innocence of childhood: 'Anch'io volevo il mio dio, uno qualunque da amare e da cui essere amata con un po' di fortuna. Ma come pregare, dove rintracciare le parole perse con l'infanzia' (*Ultima*, p. 23). She expresses her desire to return to this time of innocence which, for her, was a period before she started questioning religion and before she rejected the path of Catholicism that had been set out before her. As such, her search for origins also becomes a search for oneness with the divine, a means of healing the sense of division that resulted from her earlier rejection of Christianity. She claims to be seeking: 'quel punto segreto di sé che coincide col dio' (*Ultima*, p. 17). Her journey is therefore a search for meaning within herself as well as an exterior investigation of another culture. India is chosen as the site for this interior investigation because it presents her with a glimpse of a different way of experiencing the divine. One of the monks she meets at Sarnath is described as: 'un'apparizione che mi faceva vedere il mondo in una fase creaturale, prima che si rompesse il rapporto di comunione con dio.'(*Ultima*, p. 46). Again she presents her journey as a means of healing divisions and reveals her sense of the divine as omnipresent. At the end of her journey, she concludes: 'Il centro si sposta con noi, siamo noi quel centro' (*Ultima*, p. 163). The journey thus reconfirms her belief that spirituality is something personal, to be discovered within rather than mediated through the institution of the church.

De Carolis opens her account by relating two dreams that occurred in the week before her departure for India. Each dream features images of a house in the south of Italy in which she had lived as a child. When she awakes she tries to make a connection between the dream and *Siddhartha*, the book she had been reading before she fell asleep. The words which provide this link are 'sud' and 'nostalgia': '"Sud", il suono della terra dell'origine. Luogo della fuga e dell'impossibile ritorno' (*Appunti*, p. 11). Prior to departure then, De Carolis frames her journey as a search for lost origins and, at the same time, acknowledges the impossibility of such a reunion. The metaphorical constructions in her account which portray India as a maternal space are a further manifestation of the journey as a search for unity. Varanasi is portrayed as a city in a symbiotic, prenatal form:

> Come se ogni cosa si spostasse con movenze rallentate e fluide dentro lo spazio di un liquido amniotico, che tutto protegge e tutto accompagna. Ancora una volta è il senso dell'indivisibile unità del tutto, in cui ognuno ha il suo luogo. (*Appunti*, p. 76)

Likewise, the chaos of the streets of Jaiphur is also expressed through metaphors of the maternal:

> Ad ogni tappa si è piuttosto a tratti invasi dalla sensazione di avere raggiunto il ventre della terra. Che pullula di vita e morte, l'una inscindibile dall'altra. In un movimento continuo che non ha sosta, in uno spazio dove c'è spazio per tutti. Come se tutti vivendo bene o male e bene o male morendo, possano comunque degnamente esserne parte. Sentirsi a casa... È forse questo. Vivere un luogo dove ciascuno può trovare il senso del sé. Come se ognuno avesse la profonda consapevolezza di avere riconosciuto il diritto ad essere iscritto nel cerchio magico della danza di Shiva e lì in qualche modo acquietarsi. (*Appunti*, pp. 71-2)

Again, India appears to hold out the possibility of a return to a time before a division between self and other, although for De Carolis this is expressed as unity with the mother, whilst Petrignani presents it as unity with a universal divinity. Both however, portray a monistic sense of existence, in which everything is part of the same whole.

A further aspect of this desire for oneness is represented as a need to heal a division between mind, body and soul. Although the division between the rational mind and physical body is at the basis of much of Western philosophy, it is a principle that is challenged by the beliefs of people she encounters in India. A professor of Sanskrit tells her: 'Il dualismo occidentale separa lo spirito dalla materia. Ma è tutto uno' (*Ultima*, p. 44). De Carolis likewise expresses a desire to move beyond the boundaries of western thought, yet is sceptical at the possibility of achieving this:

> Chiusa nel mio sentire occidentale provo un po' di invidia per questo mondo dove nessuno staccato divide corpo mente e spirito, e ognuna delle parti di cui è fatto l'uomo si mescola con l'altra. Prigioniera dell'ipertrofia della mente che ha sottratto sensibilità al corpo e potenza allo spirito, e li ha relegati, inascoltati, in spazi separati e lontani. (*Appunti*, p. 54)

The physicality of the body is ever-present in India, whether in the funeral pires of Varanasi, the semi-naked workers in the fields or the vulnerability of the beggars on the streets. All provide a constant reminder of the fragility of human life. Petrignani observes that, in western societies, death, dirt and disease are hidden from view. Travel through India therefore provokes in her a questioning of the self and of the values of her own culture: 'Non sai più niente di te stesso. Che ci faccio qui, se la mia cultura mi ha insegnato a fare pulizia, a nascondere il male negli ospedali, la morte nei cimiteri, il brutto nei lazzaretti?' (*Ultima*, pp. 39-40). India therefore seems to present the travellers with a different mode of conceptualising human existence. To travel, then, is to attempt to go beyond conceptual framework offered by one's own culture.

The Literary Dimensions of Travel

One further source of inspiration for the journey can be found within literary accounts of travel. Journeys are frequently modelled on accounts of other people's travels and such texts are often taken along with the traveller, acting as form of guide and companion,

resulting in the intertextuality of travel accounts. In the style of pilgrims of old, contemporary journeys can stem from a desire to follow in the footsteps of significant figures that the traveller admires and wishes to emulate. For Petrignani these are famous writers such as Chatwin, Michaux, Moravia, Pasolini, Manganelli, or well-known literary characters such as Rudyard Kipling's Kim. De Carolis reads *Siddhartha* by Herman Hesse in the days leading up to her departure whilst Borghese too re-reads Moravia, Manganelli and Hesse as part of the preparations for her journey. Borghese's journey is further inspired by former Catholic missionaries and the desire to follow in the footsteps of St. Thomas who is supposed to have spread Christianity to southern India.

These accounts reveal, then, many different motivations behind the journey to India. The journeys they recount all seem to be born out of disillusionment with western cultures and a rejection of certain elements of their own society. Like pilgrims, the travellers desire to follow in the footsteps of other travellers and their journeys are about the search for personal transformation and meaning through an experience of the spiritual nature of another place. The theme that predominates in their writing is the search for authenticity, whether this is expressed as a desire for a more primitive form of existence, a desire for unity with the maternal or divine, or a healing of divisions between self and other, and between body and mind. Yet, the question that this gives rise to, and perhaps one could say the question that the texts ask of themselves, is whether the travellers do succeed in experiencing an authentic sense of India.

THE FAILURE OF THE JOURNEY

Much has been written on travel as a quest for authenticity, although scholars disagree as to the extent to which an authentic experience of another culture is possible, or even desired by the contemporary tourist. Daniel Boorstin dismisses tourists as he considers them to be satisfied with superficial, inauthentic experiences.[24] In the context of North American tourism, Umberto Eco suggests that tourists enjoy 'hyperreality', that is artificial replicas of reality which appear more real than the real thing.[25] On the other hand, Dean MacCannell argues that tourists are involved in a quest for authenticity which manifests itself in their desire to see behind the scenes of other cultures, to 'get in with the natives' and to see life as it really is. He considers, however, that their attempts are doomed to failure as it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish reality from staged events.[26] Jonathan Culler argues that the authentic and inauthentic are part of the same semiotic framework and therefore there is no direct experience to be had as cultures are always mediated through a system of signs: 'The authenticity the tourist seeks is at one level an escape from the code, but this escape itself is coded in turn, for the authentic must be marked to be constituted as authentic'.[27] In a similar vein, Rojek and Urry maintain that all cultures are inauthentic and contrived and as such are constantly being re-invented and re-made.[28]

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[24] Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 99.
[25] Umberto Eco, 'Travels in Hyperreality', pp. 3-58.
[26] MacCannell, p. 94.
[27] Culler, p. 165.
[28] Chris Rojek and John Urry, 'Transformations of Travel and Theory', in *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*, ed. by Chris Rojek and John Urry (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1-19 (p. 11).

Linked to the question of authenticity is the figure of the post-tourist, a concept developed by Maxine Feifer and taken up by John Urry, amongst others.[29] Urry recognises that a study of the social practice of tourism can reveal wider mechanisms at work in society and that changes in tourist practices are linked to changing patterns of consumption in society as a whole. The main economic change of the twentieth century, he argues, involved a shift from the mass consumption of Fordism to the more individuated and differentiated patterns of post-Fordist consumption. When applied to tourist practice, this shift implies a movement from efficient, controlled mass tour groups to a more personal, flexible and customised form of travel. He thus claims that post-tourism is linked to the general cultural developments of post-Fordism and postmodernism.[30] The post-tourist, according to Urry, is 'above all self-conscious, "cool" and role-distanced'.[31] Post-tourists are conscious of the practices that constitute tourism, and aware of the meaning of signs in and between cultures. They are not taken in by inauthentic attractions but playfully embrace them as a means of accessing other cultures. As Erik Cohen argues: 'the post-tourist is reflectively and playfully (and not naively) enjoying the surfaces of contrived or staged attractions, since he is resigned to the alleged disappearance of originals and of authenticity from the post-modern world.'[32]

All three writers under discussion reject the hyper-organised, efficient, streamlined group tour in favour of a more individual, tailor-made programme of travel. Yet, it could be argued that Borghese does not fit the category of post-tourist as she lacks the self-

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[29] See John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990), and Maxine Feifer, *Tourism in History*, (New York: Stein and Day, 1986).
[30] Urry, p. 11.
[31] Urry, p. 101.
[32] Cohen, p. 11.

consciousness of the other two travel writers. She does not seek to be changed by her encounter with India and her travels are a confirmation of rather than a challenge to her already existing belief system. Her journey, then, is more akin to traditional pilgrimage than it is to post-tourism. The self-consciousness of the post-tourist is, however, revealed in the writings of both Petrignani and De Carolis. It is my contention that their accounts of journeys through India demonstrate an awareness of the impossibility of an authentic, unmediated contact with another culture, and point to the limitations of their investigation and the socially constructed nature of the tourist gaze.

Immediately, in the opening lines of *Ultima India*, there seems to be an awareness that the 'real' India is out of reach. The text opens not with an image of India, but with an image of the driver/guide, thus highlighting his role as mediator of Indian culture: 'Ayyappam è riflesso in uno specchio nel tempio della danza' (*Ultima*, p. 9). This points to the impossibility of a direct, unmediated contact with India, as even Ayyappam's image is reflected to the traveller through a mirror in the temple. What both the authorial protagonist and reader see, therefore, is a representation of a representation; an impression of India that is constructed around someone else's ideas of India. The aspects of India that are revealed are largely determined by the guide whose role it is to 'mediare fra il suo mondo e il mio' (*Ultima*, p. 41). Whilst the native guide is indispensable in allowing privileged access to otherwise inaccessible places, the experience is still mediated through this figure. It is Ayyappam who decides to take Petrignani to watch the elephant ceremony, despite her being afraid of these animals (*Ultima*, p. 60). It is also Ayyappam who decides to go to the theatre at the academy for performing arts rather than the temple that Petrignani had wanted to visit. Petrignani had thought that the temple would provide a more authentic setting, however the academy allows them

access to the place where Indian students are trained in this ancient cultural dance practice. The boundaries between what is real and what is staged become blurred and it becomes impossible to distinguish between natural and contrived settings.

Petrignani's boat trip through the jungle of Periyar further highlights the impossibility of her quest for an authentic experience of India. Here, she hopes to witness an unspoilt place, one that is uncontaminated by human presence: 'La giungla è questo: natura senza necessità di presenza umana; un posto, anzi, dove la presenza umana è decisamente superflua' (*Ultima*, p. 27). The engine of the boat immediately disrupts the harmony of the natural world, heralding the presence of the traveller to the surrounding wildlife. The animals that she had hoped to see therefore remain hidden, wary of intruders. The image is one of modernity acting as a contaminating influence on a more primitive and innocent space: 'Visitarla con quei segni addosso, abiti, macchine fotografiche, motori, è sacrilegio' (*Ultima*, pp. 27-28). The paradox of the traveller wanting to visit a place uncontaminated by humans becomes evident. As many anthropologists have recognised, the presence of an outsider removes the possibility of an authentic experience of another culture. As Feifer maintains, the post-tourist knows that s/he is: 'not an invisible observer when he [sic] visits a native compound. Resolutely 'realistic', he cannot evade his condition of outsider.'[33]

The authorial consciousness in *Ultima India* also comes to realise that her experience of this culture cannot be authentic as she can never perceive it in the same way as a local inhabitant. As she travels through the jungle she seems to lack the sensory tools which would enable her to relate to this space on a more meaningful level: 'Mi pento a nome della mia intera razza di non aver coltivato i cinque sensi per svilupparne un sesto

[33] Feifer, p. 271.

superiore, di non sapere annusare e quindi di non sapere intuire' (*Ultima*, p. 29). The traveller's way of perceiving reality is shown to be culturally determined and, in this case, western thought renders her blind to her surroundings: 'non vedo niente, non vedrò niente' (*Ultima*, p. 30). Her language too is shown to be inadequate as she claims to lack the vocabulary to describe the animals that she encounters (*Ultima*, p. 31). Western ways of thinking and the constraints of language are shown to impose certain parameters on the way that another place is experienced and represented, thus making an authentic encounter impossible.

Rather than the spiritual revelation or sense of union with the divine that Petrignani was seeking, her travel account relates a sequence of what could be termed as failed encounters.[34] The tone of her language becomes increasingly ironic as she reveals herself to be sceptical of the religious practices of the communities that she visits. One such instance occurs when Petrignani journeys to Puttaparthi to meet Sai Baba only to find that he had left earlier in the day. When she explains to the reader that Sai Baba was no mere swamy, but a divinity in human form, her incredulous tone is evident. She also adopts a condescending voice when referring to his followers in Italy who had told her about his supernatural powers. Admitting her scepticism, she suggests that this perhaps was the motive he had left before her arrival: 'potevo capire che non gradisse il mio scetticismo' (*Ultima*, p. 51). As she wanders among the stalls outside the ashram, her comments provide further indication of her annoyance of the ostentatious and commercial elements of religion:

> E per quanto mi fossi attardata presso le bancarelle fuori dell'ashram e avessi anche fatto piccoli acquisti, i soliti incensi e persino la polvere sacra creata dal nulla ma su scala industriale da Baba, ero

[34] Similarly, whilst looking for his alter-ego in India, the protagonist of Tabucchi's *Notturno indiano* also experiences a series of failed encounters.

> rimasta infastidita, ferita quasi, dalle foto a colori del sant'uomo vestito d'arancio incastonate in anellini e medagliette. (*Ultima*, p. 51)

Petrignani also expresses her frustration with the mystical pronouncements of Nagananda, another spiritual guide: 'mi sto irritando come di fronte a un illusionista (*Ultima*, p. 56). Instead, a more meaningful encounter occurs with the two Italians that accompany her on this visit. Similarly, at the Krishamurti foundation, she becomes disillusioned with the banal theories and platitudes of the woman that she meets there: 'Sono delusa, in questo programma non riconosco Krishnamurti, ma soltanto principi astratti facilmente condivisibili che si ritrovano pressoché identici in ogni scuola di qualsiasi ashram' (*Ultima*, p. 103). Once again, the more significant exchange occurs with a European, this time a German, who relates his meeting with Krishnamurti. His stories reassure her and she feels 'sotto l'ala di un angelo protettore' (*Ultima*, p. 105). This, however, is a second-hand account of Indian religion as experienced through another European rather than a direct encounter.

Yet another example of a failed encounter occurs at the visit to the Theosophical society where Petrignani meets the president, Radha Burnier. She is interested in finding out about this woman's personal journey. However, the president is not willing to reveal anything of herself, preferring to talk in abstract terms: 'Mi piacerebbe conoscere la sua storia. Ma non ha intenzione di parlare di sè. [...] E perciò, inevitabilmente, mi parla del destino dell'umanità' (*Ultima*, p. 110). Petrignani once again becomes frustrated and rejects the ideas of this woman as impractical and utopian (*Ultima*, p. 111). Here, she displays a deeper interest in individual stories and life histories than in wider theories of human existence. She is more concerned with the personal journey of those that she meets and how they have arrived at their sense of spirituality and happiness. Later, she

sees a photograph of Burnier with Krishnmurti and discovers that she had been one of his close friends. She believes that this would have provided the basis for conversation and allowed her to understand more about the personality and life of Burnier, yet this information was withheld: 'Si tengono sempre per sé dei segreti apparentemente insignificanti, che potrebbero essere la chiave di volta del rapporto con gli altri' (*Ultima*, p. 112). She thus admits that the encounter is limited by her status as an outsider and that the ability to move closer to another culture depends on the willingness of others to reveal themselves.

Petrignani becomes increasingly irate when faced with what she sees as incomprehensible rituals and meaningless rules. In an emotional outburst to her driver, after being refused entry to a Hindu temple, she declares that religious practices 'sono buone per i superstiziosi e gli etnologi' and 'sono un segno della stupidità dell'essere umano' (*Ultima*, p. 118). Later, in the ideal city of Auroville she is again unmoved by the goals of the community and fails in her search for spiritual enlightenment: 'Cerco di entrare in contatto affettivo con ciò che mi circonda, di sentire i sentimenti degli altri. Ma la situazione mi lascia indifferente, non colgo vibrazioni negative, nemmeno positive, niente' (*Ultima*, p. 123). She becomes irritated by the prominence given to the founder of the community, known as the *Mère*, which seems to be a further rejection of the imposed values and belief systems. These encounters confirm her sense of religion as a personal matter, meaning that is to be found within the self rather than in any ideology. In many ways, this is similar to those explored by the journalist Irene Bignardi in her work *Le piccole utopie*, an account of her visits to seven different utopian

communities, including Shantiniketan in India.[35] Bignardi likewise rejects grand ideologies of Christianity or Communism claiming that they have unleashed destruction on millions. Instead her search is for 'piccole utopie', workable communities in which personal happiness has been discovered on a small scale.

De Carolis's search for authenticity, as I have implied, manifests itself in her desire for a personal and direct contact with India in contrast to the organised and staged visits of mass tour groups. Her implication here is that tourists do not discover the profound significance of India; they are protected by their group and are only allowed to visit sites whose meaning is contrived. But her journey reveals the impossibility of being anything more than a tourist. De Carolis has certain expectations of India as an exotic place of difference, but feels a sense of anti-climax on arrival. She is staying in a luxury hotel, a tourist establishment which offers 'sterile protezione' rather than immediate contact with India (*Appunti*, p. 14). Petrignani also admits to a similar feeling of wanting to: 'chiudermi sola nella stanza' (*Ultima*, p. 41). The hotel space acts as a buffer zone and protects them from the full impact of India. When De Carolis does venture out into the streets of Delhi, she is overwhelmed by the encounter. She had expected to be able to stroll to the centre of the city, but her obvious difference makes her an immediate target of attention for beggars and street sellers. Faced with a constant onslaught of attention, she becomes disorientated and retreats back to the protective space of the hotel. She thus becomes just like the tourists that she critiques, leaving her feeling ashamed and cowardly. From now on her journeys are by taxi or rickshaw, with a driver and guide to cushion the impact of the encounter. She therefore recognises the limitations of her journey and acknowledges that an unmediated encounter with India is not possible.

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[35] Bignardi, Irene, *Le piccole utopie* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2003)

Despite wanting to avoid tourists, De Carolis' driver takes her to the very same places that are frequented by coach tours of westerners. She suggests that this was a conscious decision on the part of her driver and a statement on the insurmountable divide between their two cultures. He was 'convinto di una nostra irrimediabile lontananza dal suo mondo'. (*Appunti*, p. 69). On several occasions she describes herself and her driver as 'turisti in fuga'. It is not just the chaos of India's cities and the mass tour groups from which she is trying to escape; she is also trying to distance herself from the figure of the tourist and, at the same time, recognising the impossibility of being anything more than a tourist in India.

She becomes aware that her status as an Italian woman creates a barrier between herself and the culture she visits. She frequently refers to India as a 'palcoscenico' indicating the way she perceives her relationship with the country, one in which the actors are separated from the viewer. She seems to acknowledge, therefore, that direct participation in Indian culture and meaningful interaction with its people is not possible (*Appunti*, p. 68). Rather, her impressions of India are constantly mediated through the figure of the driver, the guide, or framed by the window of a taxi. As she gazes out of the car window at the children who wave back to her, she wants to stop but instead the car speeds on: 'Noi siamo già oltre. Turisti, anche senza volerlo, in corsa' (*Appunti*, p. 50). She thus gazes onto India as if a spectator watching actors on a stage, or a film, always conscious of the divide between herself and the people she watches.

Curtis and Pajaczkowska suggest that taking photographs can be 'a way of maintaining a relationship of controlled proximity and distance to a lived environment',

as well as 'one way of restoring subjectivity through a process of objectification'. [36] As a professional photographer, De Carolis reflects on the implications of the tourist practice of taking photographs, displaying an awareness of the constructed nature of the gaze as well as its power. Back in the hotel room she views the recordings that she had made on a small video-camera:

> Per scoprire così come può essere difficile, a volte impossibile, puntare gli occhi addosso ad altri occhi credendo di nascondersi dietro la lente fredda d'un obiettivo. Che non filtra, anzi moltiplica. Che non allontana, piuttosto avvicina con fare indecente. Che non ritrae, piuttosto scava. Che ferisce la pelle per violare l'anima. Che ruba brani di vita. Violente. Immorale. (*Appunti*, p. 25)

The camera is presented as something intrusive and objectifying. Once again, it prevents direct contact with a culture by placing a barrier between the tourist and the object of her gaze. De Carolis also links photography to identity: the reluctance to be photographed implies a desire not to lose control over one's representation and the tourist act of photography therefore becomes a violent act of objectification. She further points to the nature of the photograph as a poor substitute for reality as they do not represent the emotion of the exchange: 'Nelle mie immagini c'è tutto, tranne tutta l'India che ho davvero visto: quella degli occhi che non implorano eppure ti guardano obbligandoti a guardarli mentre ti penetrano dentro' (*Appunti*, p. 25). The people she records on film meet her gaze and return accusatory glances which becomes disconcerting. Instead, De Carolis decides to focus her camera on monuments which are 'sguardi fissi, forme rigide in cui tutto è gia riassunto' (*Appunti*, p. 26).

Lastly, she recognises that tourists and India are both part of a global economic system and that changes in other parts of the world have an impact on a micro-level upon communities in India. She acknowledges that tourism represents an important part of India's economy but has declined in recent years because of the increased threat of

[36] Curtis and Pajaczkowska, p. 210.

terrorism. The tourist industry, then, is not an inauthentic part of India, but integral to its economic success. The tacky tourist stalls outside the temples and mosques signify India's place within this global framework. Rather than inauthentic souvenirs, they are 'una fetta di realtà con la quale fare i conti' (*Appunti*, p. 39).

CONCLUSION: THE POSTMODERN TRAVELLER

All three journeys discussed in this chapter could be considered to have strong affinities with the pilgrimage in that they involve a quest for some kind of spiritual enlightenment. Borghese's journey is a more straightforward type of pilgrimage: she pursues an itinerary which centres on Catholic and Christian sites in India which she visits not just as a tourist but as a believer and worshiper. The churches that she attends in Madras, Tanjore, Madurai, Periyar and Cochin are not inconsistent with her idea of India; neither does she find anything incongruous about having her photograph taken in India with the Bishop of Cochin underneath a portrait of the Pope (*Ritorno*, p. 118). It is rather the Hindu temples that are inconsistent with her world-view and which provoke unease, prompting her to return to her hotel and seek comfort in prayer: 'Decido, per ora almeno, di riposarmi un poco tornando con il pensiero e il cuore alla mia cultura e alla mia fede. Prendo così a recitare un rosario e mi tranquillizzo un po' (*Ritorno*, p. 57). This is just one of many references to her Catholic belief which provides an indication of the role that faith plays in underpinning her identity and in the frames of reference she uses to approach another culture. Her journey thus becomes a performance and reiteration of an existing faith. She does not seek to be transformed by the experience, rather, the journey through India represents a confirmation of identity, which, in its reliance on grand narratives, follows Bauman's description of the pilgrim:

> Pilgrims had a stake in the solidity of the world they walked; in a kind of world in which one can tell life as a continuous story, a 'sense-making' story, such a story as makes each event the effect of the event before and the cause of the event after, each age a station on the road pointing towards fulfilment.[37]

Borghese's sense of self is shown to depend on the anchoring of her family in history, to Rome and to the Catholic Church. Her account provides a sense of her own family history as well as the history of Catholicism in India. She explains, for example, that the church of St. Francis in Cochin is the oldest European-built church in India, founded by Portuguese Franciscan monks in 1503 and later taken over by the English (*Ritorno*, p. 109). The narrative of progress that she provides continues into the future as she concurs with the opinion of the Bishop of Cochin who claims that India represents the door to Asia and is the future of Catholicism. One might argue that it is in Catholicism that she finds relief from the inconsistencies of everyday life. Her stake in the solidity of her own history and religion means that she is perhaps not ready for the fragmented discontinuous identities of postmodernity.

Petrignani and De Carolis, on the other hand, represent what I have termed postmodern pilgrims, in that their journeys are a search for meaning outside their own cultural framework. Petrignani reveals a general scepticism about all-encompassing theories and is unable to embrace any religious system in its entirety. Even the nature of her narrative and the stylistic choices she makes reflect a desire to move away from rigid structure. She does not provide a clear itinerary; instead her journey is decentred and fragmented into self-contained episodes and a series of mis-encounters. Her account of travel is intensely self-reflective, yet her own personal history is notably absent from the text. Neither work contains a detailed discussion of Hindu philosophy or a history of

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[37] Bauman, p. 23.

India's religions. Rather, their focus is on finding out about micro-communities and limited political or religious projects. There is in both texts an awareness of the limits of western understanding and of the culturally-situated nature of their perspective.

The concept of postmodern identity that Bauman proposes as a counterpoint to that of the pilgrim is one in which identity is viewed as a liability rather than an asset.[38] The postmodern problem of identity, he argues, is the avoidance of fixation. These writers demonstrate a desire to escape fixed identities, whether the identity of the tourist or the religious identity that their culture proposes. Their journeys represent a flight from western civilization but lead to an intensification of their consciousness of their being part of it. The final irony, then, is that despite their desire to experiment with the concepts of identity that another culture offers they come to an awareness of not being able to escape the identity of the western tourist.

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[38] Bauman, p. 18.

CHAPTER 5

Conceptualisations of Identity in Oriana Fallaci, Lilli Gruber and Giuliana Sgrena's Representations of the Near East

TRAVEL WRITING AND JOURNALISM

Thus far the thesis has examined representations of travel from a range of generic traditions: the semi-autobiographical fiction of Erminia Dell'Oro, the private memoirs of women migrants in South America, the autobiographical writing of Bamboo Hirst and, perhaps the form most frequently identified as travel writing, the travelogues of Italian women tourists in India. These texts also have varying degrees of prominence, from the widely disseminated novels of Dell'Oro to the virtually unknown private memoirs of women migrants in South America. These representations of travel also vary in the extent to which they engage with and comment on significant moments of Italy's recent past such as Fascism, the events of the Second World War and Italian colonial history. Yet, travel writing often stems from and incorporates foreign correspondence and one aspect of travel writing that the thesis has not yet examined is the figure of the female reporter and journalistic representations of other cultures.

In *Translating Travel*, (2001) Loredana Polezzi explores the close relationship between travel writing and journalism which, she argues, partly explains the low status afforded to travel writing by Italian critics and its relative invisibility within canons of Italian literature. This association is particularly striking in the Italian context and, Polezzi claims, has existed since the very inception of Italian journalism: 'Most prominent contemporary authors [...] have written for newspapers and periodicals, whether by choice or financial necessity, and travel correspondences have been among

the most common types of contribution.'[1] This is also true in the context of Italian women's writing: the bibliographical guide in Panizza & Wood's *A History of Women's Writing in Italy* contains 102 Italian women writers born after 1700 and over a third of these are described as journalists.[2] The most famous female Italian travel writer of the nineteenth century, Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso, whose accounts of travels in Europe and the Near East first appeared in French newspapers, was famous for her political journalism as well as her travel writing.[3] Since the early twentieth century, travel pieces have become regular features of the 'terza pagina' of many Italian newspapers further reinforcing the connections between journalism and travel writing.[4] Fernanda Pivano, for example, was a prominent contributor to the 'terza pagina' and her accounts of journeys to the United States were regular features of *Corriere della Sera* and *La Nazione*.[5] Polezzi argues that many journalistic representations of travel share elements of more traditional travel narratives in that they are structured around a journey involving a dramatic encounter between the self and Other.[6] As many of the books that we read as travel texts actually began their journeys as reportage or foreign correspondence, journalistic accounts of foreign places can and should be considered a form of travel writing.

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[1] Loredana Polezzi, *Translating Travel*, p. 14.
[2] See Panizza and Wood eds., *A History of Women's Writing*, pp. 282-337. For a historical perspective on women journalists in Italy see the chapters by Verina R. Jones, 'Journalism: 1750-1850' (pp. 120-34); and Silvana Patriarca, 'Journalists and essayists: 1850-1925', (pp. 151-63).
[3] See Ricorda, pp. 116-19; Verina Jones, pp. 130-31.
[4] Polezzi, *Translating Travel*, p. 37.
[5] Pivano wrote a series of travel articles between 1980 and 1982 relating to her journey to the United States. See, for example, 'La prima volta negli States', *La Nazione*, 15 July 1981, p. 3; 'Sulla costa del Pacifico è l'ora dei poeti', *Corriere della Sera*, 4 October 1982, p. 3; 'Questa malinconia New York del riflusso', *Corriere della Sera*, 24 January 1980, p. 3.
[6] Polezzi, *Translating Travel*, p. 140.

Accounts of travel which are rooted in the journalistic tradition are frequently linked to major political occurrences. Undoubtedly, the most significant events of recent years in terms of journalistic coverage have been the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and what has subsequently been termed the 'war on terror'. These events have given rise to a huge amount of writing in Italy and in many other countries, often by foreign correspondents assigned to the Near East by their respective media organisations. Åsne Seierstad (1970-), to give just one example, is a prominent European journalist who has reported on conflicts in Russia, China, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq.[7] *The Bookseller of Kabul*, a portrait of several months spent living with an Afghan family, became an international best-seller and has been translated into over twenty-seven languages.[8] Seierstad covered the Iraq war for major Scandinavian and Dutch television channels as well as publishing articles in German, Austrian and Swiss newspapers. Her enthralling account of life in Baghdad during the first few months of the conflict, *A Hundred and One Days: A Baghdad Journal*, provides an insight into the life of a modern war correspondent, from the practicalities of daily life in a war zone to the frustrations of objective reporting under the constraints of Iraqi propaganda and the reticence of ordinary Iraqi citizens, which she describes as 'deafening lies and virtually silent gasps of truth'.[9]

In the Italian context too, many of the prominent commentators on events in the Near East in the wake of 9/11 have been women. Before resigning from *Rai* in 2004, Lilli

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[7] For biographical details of Åsne Seierstad see Virago Press: <http://www.virago.co.uk/author_results.asp?ref=e20070316164446 22&SF1=data&ST1=profile> [accessed 1 September 2007]

[8] Åsne Seierstad, *The Bookseller of Kabul*, trans. by Ingrid Christopherson (London: Virago, 2003).

[9] Åsne Seierstad, *A Hundred and One Days: A Baghdad Journal*, trans. by Ingrid Christopherson (London: Virago, 2004), p. 2.

Gruber was one of the most familiar faces on Italian television.[10] Born in Bolzano in 1957, she entered journalism in 1983 and in 1987 became the first woman in Italy to present the 19.45 evening news on Tg2, an event which Gruber describes as 'una piccola rivoluzione culturale in un Paese e in una tv molto maschilista'.[11] She soon became a foreign correspondent, reporting the fall of the Berlin wall, the break up of the Soviet Union, the 1991 Gulf War and the 1992 American Presidential elections. In January 2003 she travelled to Baghdad where she covered the first few months of the conflict in Iraq. Her book of war reportage, *I miei giorni a Baghdad*, sold over 100,000 copies in Italy. Gruber's experience as a war correspondent in Baghdad prompted her to take a closer look at the societies and cultures of the Islamic Near East, a trajectory that led to more journeys to Iraq, Iran and Lebanon. *L'altro Islam: un viaggio nella terra degli Sciiti* discusses Shia communties in the region, with particular reference to the political affirmation of Shiite Muslims in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Gruber's developing interest in the position of women in Islamic countries is evident in *Chador: nel cuore diviso dell'Iran*, an account of a month spent in Iran in which Gruber focuses on the complexities of daily life, culture and politics in present day Iran from a specifically gendered perspective.[12]

In April 2004 Gruber resigned her post at RAI citing her objections to Berlusconi's unresolved conflict of interests and claiming that the broadcasting media were under increasing pressure to reflect the position of the centre-right government (*Altro*, pp. 310-

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[10] For biographical information on Lilli Gruber see her home page <http://www.lilligruber.net> [accessed 1 November 2006]

[11] See interview with Giorgia Camandona for *News2000 Italia Online*, 4 December 2003: <http://news2000.libero.it/editoriali/eda80.html> [accessed 1 November 2006]

[12] Lilli Gruber, *I miei giorni a Baghdad* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2003); *L'altro Islam: un viaggio nella terra degli sciiti* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2004); *Chador: nel cuore diviso dell'Iran* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2005).

11).[13] In June of the same year she was elected a member of the European Parliament after standing against Berlusconi as a candidate for the centre-left Olive Tree Alliance. In the European Parliament, she currently serves as a member of the commission for civil liberties, justice and home affairs, is Chair of the delegation for relations with the Gulf States and acts as a substitute member for the delegation for relations with Iran. Her political activities demonstrate her continued commitment to human rights, equality of women, freedom of information and pluralism of the media. [14]

Another well-known journalist and war correspondent, Giuliana Sgrena (1948-), joined the foreign desk at *Il Manifesto* in 1988, specialising in the Near East and the Horn of Africa.[15] She has reported on the war in Afghanistan with particular reference to the oppression of women in the country, which is the focus of *Alla scuola dei Taleban*.[16] Sgrena also made numerous journeys to Iraq and took part in the peace protests in Baghdad in February 2003. *Il fronte Iraq: diario di una guerra permanente* documents the events of March and April 2003 from the outbreak of war until the arrival of US troops in Baghdad and ousting of Sadaam Hussein.[17] Sgrena came to the world's attention on 4 February 2005 when she was abducted outside a mosque at Baghdad's Al-Nahrein University where she had gone to interview a group of Fallujian refugees. She was eventually freed after exactly one month in captivity, but on the way to the airport

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[13] See also <http://www.lillieilcavaliere.it/sinossi_eng.asp> [accessed 1 November 2006] and <http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Politica/2004/04_Aprile/27/gruber.shtml> [accessed 1 November 2006

[14] Some of her recent activities have involved campaigns to save two young women, one Iranian and one Yemenite, from the death penalty. She has also brought to the attention of the EU the involvement of political parties in Maltese television broadcasting. See <www.lilligruber.net> and 'Lilli Gruber', *Delegazione Italiana nel Gruppo Socialista al Parlamento Europeo*:
<http://www.delegazionepse.it/delegazione/dettaglio.asp?id_aut=45> [accessed 1 November 2006]

[15] See 'Giuliana Sgrena: Biography', *Il Manifesto*:
<http://www.ilmanifesto.it/pag/sgrena/en/420dc096c9c4d.html> [accessed 1 November 2006]

[16] Giuliana Sgrena, *Alla scuola dei Taleban* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2002).

[17] Giuliana Sgrena, *Il fronte Iraq: diario di una guerra permanente* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2004).

the car in which she was travelling came under fire at an American checkpoint resulting in the death of Nicola Calipari, the Italian intelligence agent who had helped secure her release.[18] Sgrena provides her version of the events surrounding her kidnapping and release in *Fuoco amico*.[19]

Another journalist Marinella Correggia (1959-), who also collaborates with *Il Manifesto*, travelled to Baghdad as a peace protester immediately before the outbreak of war in 2003. She relates her personal experiences, as well as interviews with both Iraqi citizens and American soldiers in *Si ferma una bomba in volo?*.[20] Tiziana Ferrario (1957-), a television presenter and newsreader, became the first woman to present the 22.30 news on Tg1. She too has worked as a reporter in Afghanistan and Iraq, publishing *Il vento di Kabul*: *cronache afghane* in 2006.[21]

As public figures, these women journalists are able to access a wide audience through their broadcasts, newspaper articles and published accounts of journeys to the Near East. Thus, they play a huge role in shaping public perceptions of these cultures. Their writings can be approached in a variety of perspectives: their contribution to the reception of Islam in Italy, their position with regard to political movements of both the Left and the Right, or the degree to which they reflect popular sentiment in Italy. However, one aspect that the texts share and which plays a major part in the way in which they define the divide between East and West is the way in which they present the

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[18] See 'Il 4 marzo Giuliana Sgrena è stata liberata. Assassinato il suo liberatore', *Il Manifesto* <http://www.ilmanifesto.it/pag/sgrena/> [accessed 1 November 2006]

[19] Giuliana Sgrena, *Fuoco amico* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2005).

[20] Marinella Correggia, *Si ferma una bomba in volo?: L'utopia pacifista a Baghdad* (Piacenza: Berti, 2003).

[21] Tiziana Ferrario, *Il vento di Kabul: cronache afghane* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 2006). See also 'Afghanistan: intervista a Tiziana Ferrario', *Passi nel Deserto*: <http://passineldeserto.blogosfere.it/2006/09/afghanistan_intervista_a_tiziana_ferrario.html> [accessed 1 November 2006] and 'Tiziana Ferrario: Il vento di Kabul', *Baldini Castoli Dalai Editore*: <http://www.bcdeditore.it/Catalogo/Scheda_autore.aspx?idp=2199> [accessed 1 November 2006]

self of their respective authors. Naturally, many of the texts that I have mentioned so far have strong pretensions to honest and truthful reporting and it might be argued that the texts do not have highly conscious narrators with a strong sense of autobiographical consciousness. Yet, the positioning of the self is a fundamental part of the way reality is perceived in all travel writing and these texts are no exception as public utterance is also a question of private subjectivity. Further, if we take Stuart Hall's point that identities are constructed relationally, through processes of boundary-drawing and exclusion, then it is clear that the way in which each writer attempts to define herself has a major impact on her understanding and representation of the Other.[22] The construction of a common European identity likewise involves a continual process of negotiating and redefining the parameters between the European and non-European. David Morley and Kevin Robins argue that since the fall of the Iron Curtain, it is Islam rather than communism that now supplies Europe with its eastern boundary.[23] In other words, then, the way in which the writer presents herself in her writing and situates herself in relation to discourses of nationhood frames the encounter between East and West.

One can, as I have suggested, read their texts as journalistic, that is, as the revelation of a series of objective truths about the countries that they visit and the events they report. However, what I intend to do in this chapter is to read these books as autobiographical accounts of travel, perhaps in a way that they are not intended to be read. In this way, I attempt to show how distinct authorial figures emerge from each account, which in turn leads to different interpretations of their encounter with Islamic cultures of the Near East. This chapter focuses on the writing of Lilli Gruber and

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[22] Stuart Hall, 'Who Needs 'Identity'?', in *Identity: A Reader*, ed. by Paul du Gay and others (London: Sage, 2000), pp. 15-31 (p. 17).
[23] Morley and Robins, pp. 3-31, see in particular pp. 18-19.

Giuliana Sgrena and will explore some of the ways the writers present themselves in their texts and suggest the implications of these. Among the questions that will be addressed here are: what subject positions are adopted and what self-configurations do they rely upon in their respective works? How does their consciousness (or lack of consciousness) of gender find expression in their writing? What is the impact of their sense of being a public figure and to what extend do they feel they are engaging with history? How does the context of the institutional site from which they speak shape their writing? For what type of audience do they feel they are writing and what notion of national identity circulates in their texts?

ORIANA FALLACI'S POLEMIC

Before moving on to my analysis of the self-representations of Gruber and Sgrena, there is one major writer that any discussion of journalism, war correspondence and representations of the Near East cannot fail to mention. Oriana Fallaci (1930-2006) has been described as 'the greatest female author and journalist of her time' and 'the most extraordinary journalist Italy has ever produced'.[24] Fallaci was a controversial figure, famed for her uncompromising beliefs and tenacious interviewing style which she demonstrated in interviews with leaders such as Indira Ghandi, Ayatollah Khomeini, Henry Kissinger and Yasser Arafat.[25] She has reported from conflicts in Vietnam, Chechnya, Lebanon, Mexico City and the Persian Gulf prompting John Gatt-Rutter to

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[24] See Peter Popham, 'Oriana Fallaci: Obituary', *Independent*, 19 September 2006, p. 38.

[25] For more details of Fallaci's early life and career see John Gatt-Rutter, *Oriana Fallaci: The Rhetoric of Freedom* (Oxford: Berg, 1996) pp. 6-21; Santo L. Aricò, *Oriana Fallaci: The Woman and the Myth* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998); and Alba Amoia, *Twentieth-Century Italian Women Writers: The Feminine Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), pp. 112-24. On Fallaci as a travel writer see 'Oriana Fallaci', in *Great Women Travel Writers from 1750 to the Present*, ed. by Alba Amoia and Bettina L. Knapp (London and New York: Continuum, 2005). Margaret Talbot also assesses Fallaci's career in her interview, 'The Agitator: Oriana Fallaci Directs her Fury toward Islam', in *The New Yorker*, 82 (2006), 58-67 (p. 59).

generously describe her as 'Italy's first female war correspondent'.[26] War and religious belief are central features of her writing: *Niente e così sia* (1969) reports on the Vietnam war, whilst her fictional work, *Insciallah* (1990) set in Lebanon in 1983 comments on religious tensions in the region. Her fiercely polemical essay, *La rabbia e l'orgoglio* was written from her apartment in Manhattan in the days following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington DC. It was originally published as an article in *Corriere della Sera* on 29 September 2001 and an extended book version was released a short time later which went on to sell over a million copies in Italy alone. *La rabbia e l'orgoglio* was followed by *La forza della ragione* in 2004 and *Oriana Fallaci intervista se stessa. L'apocalisse* in 2005.[27]

In this trilogy of texts, Fallaci alleges that that a reverse crusade is already under way across Europe. She claims that through immigration and a high birth rate, Muslims are staging an organised invasion aimed at destroying the European way of life and supplanting it with that of Islam. As with so many of her previous texts, the trilogy was to gain popular success in Italy, despite a predominantly negative critical reception.[28] Furthermore, the trilogy has also gained notoriety for its islamophobic content and Fallaci became the subject of lawsuits in Italy and France, for her alleged defamation of Islam.[29]

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[26] Gatt-Rutter, p. 13. This accolade could be extended to the nineteenth-century journalist, Jessie White Mario, and her reports of the battles of the Risorgimento. See Patriarca, pp. 155-57.

[27] Oriana Fallaci, *La rabbia e l'orgoglio* (New York: Rizzoli International, 2001); *La forza della ragione* (New York: Rizzoli International, 2004); *Oriana Fallaci intervista sé stessa. L'apocalisse* (New York: Rizzoli International, 2005).

[28] Loredana Polezzi discusses the critical reception of Fallaci's earlier texts in 'Crossing Borders and Exploiting Hybridity: Language, Gender and Genre in the Works of Oriana Fallaci', *Translating Travel*, pp. 137-63.

[29] For a discussion of Islamophobia in Fallaci's work see Francesca Orsini, 'Cannons and Rubber Boats: Oriana Fallaci and the "Clash of Civilizations"', *Interventions*, 8 (2006) 444-60. Stefano Allievi, a sociologist and expert on Islamic culture, provides a critical analysis of Fallaci's views on Islam in *Ragione senza forza, forze senza ragione: Una risposta a Oriana Fallaci* (Bologna: EMI, 2004), and

Fallaci's thesis depends on a polarising of identities, of Christianity and Islam, of East and West, of self and other, thus compounding the 'clash of civilizations' theory. [30] Her interpretation of the world and her place within it depends on monolithic constructions of East and West which, Edward Said would argue, are ideological fictions concealing many diverse cultures and individual histories.[31] Said's comments in his preface to the 2003 edition of *Orientalism* are presented as a general attack on the American media, but his critique of how reductive stereotypes and polarised identities are used to ferment hatred and pride can easily be read as response to Fallaci:

> That these supreme fictions [West and Orient] lend themselves easily to manipulation and the organization of collective passion has never been more evident than in our time, when the mobilizations of fear, hatred, disgust and resurgent self-pride and arrogance – much of it having to do with Islam and the Arabs on one side, 'we' Westerners on the other – are very large scale enterprises.[32]

This is precisely this type of Orientalist construction of identity upon which Fallaci's interpretation of Islamic cultures depends.

Within this polarisation of East and West, the self-positioning of the author plays a crucial role in sustaining her argument. Several of the aspects of Fallaci's identity that I

Niente di personale, Signora Fallaci (Reggio Emilia: Aliberti, 2006). Magdi Allam accuses Fallaci of failing to distinguish between extreme and moderate forms of Islam in *Vincere la paura* (Milan: Mondadori, 2005), pp. 171-78. The *US Economist* (July 23, 2005, p. 46) labels Fallaci 'a vituperative literary crusader' and describes her most recent work as 'a hate-filled, anti-Islamic diatribe' which plays into the hands of al-Qaeda. Rana Kabbani in 'Bible of the Muslim Haters', criticises Fallaci's tendency to equate all Arabs and Muslims with terrorism, describing *La rabbia e l'orgoglio* as 'rabidly Islamophobic' and full of 'vitriolic prejudice' (See *Guardian*, 11 June 2002: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,731076,00.html> [accessed 1 September 2007]. See also Tiziano Terzani, 'Lettera da Firenze', *Corriere della Sera*, 8 October 2001; Umberto Eco, 'Le guerre sante passione e ragione', *La Repubblica*, 5 October 2001; and Marco Belpoliti, 'The Anger and the Pride', *Foreign Policy*, 130 (2002) 84-86.

[30] The 'clash of civilizations' is an expression that has entered into popular usage since the publication of an eponymous article by Samuel Huntington in *Foreign Affairs*, 72.3 (1993), 22-28. In his thesis, Huntington argues that in the post Cold War era, people will be divided by ethnic and religious differences rather than political ideologies or economic systems. Huntington's theory is a further manifestation of how the polarisation of identities can lead to ideas of an irrevocable clash between East and West.

[31] Said uses the term *Orientalism* to refer to a system of ideas by which the Orient is constructed within Western consciousness. He demonstrates how a body of meanings and connotations has developed surrounding the Orient. Such discourses, he argues, have been manipulated in order to justify Western control and domination of strategically important regions of the East and Near East.

[32] Said, pp. xii, xiii.

outline here have been raised by Polezzi in relation to her earlier novels, most notably her refusal of feminine stereotypes in favour of an androgynous or masculine public persona, her fierce individualism, her notion of self as a legendary figure and her reliance on the rhetoric of otherness.[33] But, whilst some have seen these recent works as a departure from earlier texts, I suggest that her self-presentation is entirely consistent with the narrative persona revealed in her previous writing and provides the key to understanding her views on Islam.

Many studies of Fallaci point to the strong assertive subjectivity that her work reveals. Critics often accuse her of being egocentric, or as Rana Kabbani puts it rather more kindly, 'she communicates her ego in her writing'.[34] In *La rabbia e l'orgoglio*, Fallaci's notion of self as an important public figure is evident from the comparisons she draws between herself and celebrated figures from Italy's past such as Giuseppe Garibaldi, Federico Confalonieri, Piero Maroncelli and Giuseppe Avezzana. Many of these, like Fallaci, had sought refuge in the US, they shared her disillusionment with Italian politics and her belief that Italy is in danger of being swamped by foreign influences. These figures are presented as her friends, as the following images of male camaraderie serve to illustrate:

> Voglio dire: qui sto in buona compania. Quando mi manca l'Italia [...] non ho che chiamare quei modelli della mia fanciullezza: fumare una sigaretta con loro, chiedergli di consolarmi un po'. Mi-dia-una-mano, Salvemini. Mi-dia-una-mano, Cianca. Mi-dia-una-mano Garosci... Oppure non ho che evocare i gloriosi fantasmi di Garibaldi, Maroncelli, Confalonieri eccetera. Fagli un inchino, offrirgli un grappino, mettere il disco del Nabucco. (*Rabbia*, p. 12)

In *La forza della ragione,* Fallaci defines herself as a modern day Mastro Cecco, a figure burnt alive for heresy. She too sees herself as an object of hatred, someone who is persecuted for speaking truth and the trials in Italy and France in which she was accused

[33] Polezzi, *Translating Travel*, pp. 137-63.
[34] Kabbani, 2002.

of defaming Islam only serve to reinforce this belief. By situating herself within this group of Italian heroes, Fallaci constructs a legendary status for herself and provides a clear indication that she senses she is contributing to a significant moment of Italian history.

Fallaci vehemently refuses any alliances with political parties or interest groups, maintaining her position of fierce individualism. Instead, she repeatedly describes herself as a courageous soldier and revolutionary. In a speech at the Centre for the Study of Popular Culture, published as a postscript to the American edition of *The Force of Reason*, Fallaci insists: 'I am not a Conservative. I don't sympathize with the Right more than I do with the Left. Though I reject any political classification, I consider myself a revolutionary.'[35] She also distances herself from feminism, dismissing Italian feminists for failing to defend the rights of Islamic women, whilst she refers to the latter as stupid. Notably, all the revolutionary figures with whom she associates herself are male and throughout the trilogy, she consistently identifies with stereotypical constructions of masculinity such as patriotism, courage, strength and anger (*Rabbia*, p. 39)[36]. She insists that 'she has balls', an expression which becomes synonymous with heroic defiance (*Rabbia*, p. 35).[37] This reluctance to accept a female gendered identity and the adoption of a masculine public persona coincide with Fallaci's descriptions of herself as 'un giornalista' and 'uno scrittore'.[38]

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[35] Oriana Fallaci, *The Force of Reason* (New York: Rizzoli International, 2006), p. 294.
[36] According to Amoia in *Twentieth-Century Italian Women Writers*, 'her models have always been men – from her antifascist father to her journalistic uncle, from Jack London to Ernest Hemingway and Norman Mailer' (pp. 118-19). Orsini, however, claims that Fallaci also took to powerful women leaders such as Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Golda Meir (p. 447).
[37] Luciano Andreotti, (quoted in Orsini, p. 448) suggests that Fallaci's use of masculinist rhetoric combined with use of expletives is reminiscent of the bombastic political speeches of the Lega Nord.
[38] Gatt-Rutter, pp. 5-6; Polezzi, *Translating Travel*, p. 148.

Fallaci's notion of self is also evidenced from the relationship she constructs with her audience. She establishes a relationship (by no means an equal one) with her reader through the use of direct address, informal register, colloquial language and non-standard punctuation.[39] The resulting impression is that of an impromptu email, a spontaneous outpouring of emotion. Yet, she defines *La rabbia e l'orgoglio* as a sermon which, aside from a fitting description for an apocalyptic diatribe which warns of the impending destruction of western civilization, it also indicates the subject position that Fallaci adopts in the text. The religious connotations of 'sermon' suggests that she positions herself as a superior authority, a sort of modern-day prophet whose role it is to enlighten the ignorant: 'aprire gli occhi a chi non vuol vedere, sturare le orecchie a chi non vuole udire, indurre a pensare chi non vuol pensare' (*Rabbia*, p. 21). The didactic tone of her writing varies from condescending to contemptuous. Whilst at times she addresses the implied reader as 'caro mio' or 'cari miei' (*Rabbia*, pp. 39, 83, 127), she also frequently addresses her implied readers as 'scemi' (*Rabbia*, pp. 79, 83, 127). Fallaci offers no right of reply, stipulating that she does not read any criticism of her work and will not engage in any debate: ' non avrei participato a risse o polemiche vane' (*Rabbia*, p. 41). Although her earlier works, *Niente e così sia* (1969) for example, include many interviews in which voices of others are allowed into the text, this is not the case here: tellingly the last title in the trilogy is *Oriana Fallaci intervista se stessa.* The unidirectional nature of these texts is also evident from the way in which she insists on translating these texts into English herself, leading to a series of idiosyncratic errors

[39] Gatt-Rutter suggests that Fallaci's distinctive oratorical style stemmed from long hours spent transcribing tape recorded interviews which resulted in her sensing writing as speech (p. 12). Orsini and Andreotti argue that her use of colloquial language and expletives are reminiscent of the political rhetoric used by the Lega Nord (Andreotti quoted in Orsini, p. 448).

of grammar and syntax, which only reinforce the image of Fallaci as self-reliant and individualistic.

Fallaci's argument is founded upon a strong sense of national identity. 'La mia Patria è l'Italia e io amo l'Italia' (*Rabbia*, p. 135). Francesca Orsini has argued that her trilogy resonates with many sections of the Italian public as it provides an outlet for national sentiments that have been suppressed since the end of the Second World War:

> The appeal of her polemic to a proud national identity and the defence of Italian territory against immigrants from Islamic countries echoes a discourse on the defence of Italy's, and Europe's 'Christian roots' that finds favour among wide sections of the Italian clergy (including the current Pope, Benedict XVI), Lega Nord and other members of the centre-right coalition, and, most importantly, among many Italians.[40]

John Dickie has claimed that all forms of nationalism are based on the assumption that a nation is a single entity and he isolates four main ways in which this fiction can be perpetuated: the production of a narrative of the nation's history, an investment in national symbols, imagining the nation as a defined geographical space and setting it against other nations and other peoples.[41] *La rabbia e l'orgoglio* presents a virtually paradigmatic example of such constructions of national identity. The Renaissance, Risorgimento and Resistance form the basis of Fallaci's narrative of the Italian nation (*Rabbia*, pp. 87, 123). Symbols of national identity such as the tricolour flag and the anthem are invoked frequently to stir national pride. In her invective against the homogenizing effect of the European Union, even Italy's culinary delights are employed as national symbols: 'insieme al parmigiano e il gorgonzola l'Italia sta sacrificando la propria lingua, la propria identità nazionale' (*Rabbia*, p. 162).

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[40] Orsini, p. 445.
[41] John Dickie, 'Imagined Italies', in *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. by David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 19-33 (p. 22).

An array of impressive monuments, cityscapes and piazzas also become representative of Italy's cultural achievements and their permanence indicates strength in the face of adversity. Fallaci's attachment to her hometown is evident in the sites she chooses, as with the exception of Rome, they are all situated in the North of Italy and centred on her native Florence:

> Però sono italiana quindi penso ancor di più alla Cappella Sistina e alla Cupola di San Pietro e al Colosseo, al Ponte dei Sospiri e a piazza San Marco e ai palazzi sul Canal Grande, al Duomo di Milano e al Cenacolo e al Codice Atlantico di Leonardo da Vinci. Sono toscana quindi penso ancor di più alla Torre di Pisa e alla piazza dei Miracoli, al Duomo di Siena e alla piazza del Campo, alle necropoli etrusche e alle torri di San Gimignano. Sono fiorentina quindi penso ancor di più a Santa Maria del Fiore, alla Torre di Giotto, al Battistero, al Palazzo della Signoria, alla Loggia dell'Orcagna, agli Uffizi, a Palazzo Pitti, al Corridoio Vasariano e al Ponte Vecchio che oltre tutto è l'unico ponte rimasto perchè il Ponte a Santa Trinita è ricostruito. Il nonno di Bin Laden ossia Hitler me lo fece saltare in aria nel 1944 [...] E se i fottuti figli di Allah mi distruggessero uno solo di quei tesori, uno solo, assassina diventerei io. (*Rabbia*, p. 35)

These famous monuments become inseparable from Fallaci's sense of *italianità*; they not only contribute to her portrayal of Italy as a great civilization but also reinforce her sense of belonging to a particular location, in this case Italy, Tuscany and Florence. Any threat to these symbols is interpreted as a threat to her very person, hence the personalised forms in the above passage: 'me lo fece saltare' and 'mi distruggessero'. Moreover, the perceived threat to such monuments represents not just physical danger but a strike at the core of Italian cultural and national identity.

Fallaci adopts the same techniques in her construction of a European identity, evoking well-known monuments such as Big Ben, Westminster Abbey and the Eiffel Tower as symbols of their respective country's power and traditions (*Forza*, p. 62). As she imagines Europe, she carefully outlines its geographical boundaries: 'Dallo Stretto di Gibilterra ai fiordi di Sørøy, dalle scogliere di Dover alle spiagge di Lampedusa, dalle steppe di Volgograd alle vallate della Loira e alle colline della Toscana, l'incendio divampa' (*Forza*, p. 37). Europe's territorial integrity is presented as non-negotiable as it

does not include what she defines as the non-European Turkey, whose entry into the EU, Fallaci claims, would represent a 'monstrous calamity'.[42]

Despite defining herself as a Christian atheist, Fallaci considers Catholicism to be an intrinsic part of her identity as an Italian: 'La nostra identità culturale è molto precisa e bando alle chiacchiere: da duemila anni non prescinde da una religione che si chiama religione cristiana e da una chiesa che si chiama Chiesa Cattolica' (*Rabbia*, p. 152). The Catholic Church, she claims, pervades all areas of Italian life: architecture, history, landscape, the sounds of its cities, and artistic heritage. The values of the Italian people, she argues, have developed over centuries within the parameters of a Christian, Catholic ideology. In *La forza della ragione*, she emphasises the importance in Italy of the ubiquitous crucifix, which she considers a symbol of cultural heritage, without which many battles would not have been fought and won and, she claims: 'senza il crocifisso la nostra civiltà non esisterebbe (*Forza*, p. 207).

Fallaci's construction of self and nation relies heavily upon the construction of an alien Other and a construction of Italian national identity centred on Catholicism clearly operates to exclude Muslims. Indeed, her entire thesis depends on constructing the parameters of Italian and European identity in such a way that marks Muslims as outsiders. Fallaci therefore establishes a set of binary oppositions between the West and Islam, juxtaposing 'us' and 'them', good and evil, freedom and oppression: 'They' are in 'our' country, 'our' homelands, and have no respect for 'our' laws (*Forza*, p, 52). She constructs a simplistic image of Muslims in which the categories of Arab, Muslim, fundamentalist and terrorist are collapsed into one monolithic notion of Islam.

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[42] Fallaci, *The Force of Reason*, Postscript, p. 297.

> Esempio: oltre cinque milioni di americani sono arabo-mussulmani. E quando un Mustafà o un Muhammed viene diciamo dall'Afghanistan per visitare lo zio, nessuno gli proibisce di frequentare [...] una scuola di pilotaggio per imparare a guidare un 757. (*Rabbia*, p. 61)

Muslims who live inside the geographical boundaries of Italy are depicted as drug dealers, petty criminals, prostitutes or aggressive street vendors are portrayed as intruding into Italian spaces, urinating on, even raping Italy's monuments thus symbolically trampling on Italian identity (*Rabbia*, p. 125). Her conceptualisation of national identity is one based on fixed and narrow parameters, constructed around a narrative of selective moments in Italian history and drawing on the achievements of exceptional figures. It is one that holds the symbols and values of Catholicism as integral to notions of cultural belonging. Most importantly, it is based on positioning herself and her nation against an enemy other, in this case Islam.

LILLI GRUBER'S DIALOGUE WITH THE NEAR EAST

Whilst Fallaci's thesis clearly depends on a distinct polarization of identities, other commentators on events in the Near East have attempted to provide a more nuanced representation of the cultures they encounter. Lilli Gruber's writings on the Near East represent an attempt to move nearer to other cultures and to promote reciprocal understanding. In so doing she aims to deconstruct her own fears and those of her implied western reader, thus avoiding the cultural and religious confrontation that Fallaci portrays as inevitable. Her desire to 'girare il mondo', 'interpretarlo' and to foster understanding and dialogue between Europe and the Near East is reflected both in her political activities and through her writing (*Altro*, p. 309).

I miei giorni a Baghdad, *L'altro Islam* and *Chador* are an evolving series of texts in which Gruber delves into the identity of the Near East. On the surface, the trilogy

represents a series of outward journeys into Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Iran but the three texts also represent a more personal inward journey, which Gruber partially acknowledges is a journey into her own sense of who she is. Each text presents a different facet of the writer: her role within the Italian media, her relationship with the institutions for which she works and an expansion of her personal views on issues such as the Iraq War, the Islamic veil and women's rights. Moreover, her encounters prompt her to interrogate the very notion of personal identity.

I miei giorni a Baghdad is ostensibly a book of war reportage but it says a lot about how Gruber sees herself as a media figure and how her identity is constrained by institutional practices. There is, in this text, a preoccupation with her identity as a television broadcaster and as a public figure. As a former newsreader, Lilli Gruber has one of the most instantly recognisable faces in Italy and is well-known for her glamorous image. Indeed, her face is conspicuously present on the front cover of all her books. She is often referred to as 'Lilli la rossa' on account of her flame-red hair, which she herself describes as 'troppo rossi per i gusti dei mullah' (*Chador*, p. 16). This reveals a concern with maintaining this image. She is often conscious of her physical appearance, reflecting perhaps the expectations of a style-conscious Italian public (*Giorni*, p. 41). *I miei giorni* is one of the most informative on the physical conditions facing the modern war correspondent. Yet, despite the bombs falling around her, the intermittent electricity supply and lack of water, she still ensures that she appears well-groomed, insisting that this is a mark of respect to her audience: 'Cerco comunque di mantenermi sempre in ordine, presentabile, con un leggero trucco quando vado in onda per evitare il più possible quello che Ángela e io chiamiamo il 'look del profugo' (*Giorni*, p. 175).

Although she demonstrates an awareness of her public status, her journey is also about a figure who wishes to cast off some of the constraints that her institutional role places upon her. *I miei giorni a Baghdad* becomes an outlet for her personal views which had, to a certain extent, been suppressed in her public broadcasts. The written text is a space where she no longer has to play the role of an impartial and objective reporter who disappears behind the message but in which she can give vent to her subjective opinions and become a character in her narrative: 'È per questo che ho deciso di scrivere un libro. Per andare oltre i fatti e avventurarmi nel campo più elaborato e delicato delle valutazioni e dei giudizi' (*Giorni*, p. 10). The text thus allows for an elaboration of her anti-war stance and reveals the author's increasingly critical views on military action in Iraq.

As the title suggests, *I miei giorni a Baghdad* is more about Gruber's personal experiences as a war correspondent in Baghdad than it is about the condition of women in Islamic societies, a subject that she moves on to discuss in her later texts. As a female journalist reporting from a war zone, her initial concern in this text is to position herself as a competent reporter and reliable narrator in a male dominated environment. She establishes her authority by referring to her previous experience, insisting on her professionalism and contrasting her methodology with that of other journalists. She stresses her knowledge of local customs, language and people, thus avoiding accusations of ethnocentricity. She insists: 'Lo conosco bene, l'Iraq' (*Giorni*, p. 17) and draws on a body of cultural knowledge obtained from previous journeys, such as giving small gifts as tokens of appreciation, explaining to the reader that such gifts should not be too expensive or they could be interpreted as an attempt at bribery (*Giorni*, p. 19). She again emphasises her experience by relating how she had left behind the survival manuals

given to her by her employees as she considered 'l'esperienza maturata sul campo' to be of far greater practical benefit (*Giorni*, p. 15). Similarly, in *Chador*, she portrays herself a veteran reporter: 'Vent'anni di reportage nei luoghi più pericolosi del mondo ti fanno sviluppare un sesto senso' (*Chador*, p. 91). She also stresses her professional attitude and dedication to her work: 'La televisione è uno strumento di comunicazione straordinario al quale ho dedicato la mia vita professionale' (*Giorni*, p. 9). Her knowledge and experience of Islamic culture becomes a way of distinguishing herself from the figure of the embedded journalist. Gruber contrasts her method of reporting with what she considers the inevitable bias of those who live and travel with their military companions. She maintains: 'gli inviati devono essere testimoni, non guerrieri' (*Giorni*, p. 15). Instead, she claims to offer a more accurate depiction of the events in Baghdad by situating herself amongst the civilian population of Baghdad, although she is also conscious that her position as a western journalist makes it difficult for her to access certain spaces and prevents her from speaking to many Iraqis (*Giorni*, p. 17). There is, then, an awareness in her writing that the way events are represented is largely determined by the position and viewpoint of the reporter. In other words, the self is recognised as playing a key role in the narration of the story (*Giorni*, p. 15).

I miei giorni a Baghdad, aside from a book of war reportage, is a text in which Gruber's subjectivity is revealed. It shows an awareness of her status and responsibilities as a public service broadcaster, yet it is a text in which she demonstrates a desire to move beyond the restrictions that this entails. It also shows how the institutional position of the reporter places certain limitations on the representation of another culture.

The events in Iraq covered in *I miei giorni* prompt Gruber to take a closer look into Shia Muslim cultures in the region. *L'altro Islam* (2004) is therefore a continuation of

her journey into the identity of the Near East and is written in response to what she sees as a growing anti-Islamic sentiment in the West, especially surrounding Shia Muslim culture. The text is an account of a society in transition and also of an identity in transition as it documents Gruber's resignation from RAI and the beginning of her political career. Despite such a dramatic change in her official role and status, Gruber insists that her wider commitments have remained unchanged:

> Ho cominciato il libro come giornalista e l'ho finito come deputata europea. Non mi sembra di aver cambiato mestiere. Continuerò a mettere al servizio del pubblico la mia passione di sempre: la passione di capire. (*Altro*, p. 14)

Her emphasis is on dialogue and attaining knowledge and her writing is permeated with the verbs *imparare*, *capire*, *dialogare* and *parlare*. Gruber aims to demystify Islam, enlighten her reader by providing knowledge of this other culture. In many ways, however, this involves adjusting her personal views to the diplomacy that her new role as a politician requires. As a consequence, *L'altro Islam*, is an ambiguous text in which Gruber appears to suppress her own opinions in an attempt to provide an objective interpretation of the other culture. Her voice, however, is never far from the surface.

Gruber focuses on the religious group as a whole rather than on individual struggles; international politics rather than women's rights. She first acknowledges the growing suspicions directed at Shiite Muslims, a community which, she writes, 'per molti è sinonimo di violenza, intolleranza, oscurantismo' (*Altro*, p. 11). Her intention is to immerse herself in this culture in an attempt to move beyond the reductive images of religious fundamentalism commonly portrayed in the western media. Her journey through Lebanon, Iraq and Iran is an attempt to dispel the myths surrounding this culture and promote an understanding of this particular religious group. She asks: 'Come parlare con loro e costruire un futuro pacifico?'(*Altro*, p. 11), reflecting her belief that increased

knowledge of other cultures will lead, not to increased conflict, but to a more harmonious coexistence:

> Non siamo stati capaci di fermare questa guerra, ma ora dobbiamo impedire la prossima: una guerra di religioni, di culture, di civiltà, nella quale gli ideologi neoconservatori e i fanatici del jihad vogliono trascinarci. (*Altro*, p. 13)

In her approach then, there is a conscious sense that a person is the product of the discourses that they consume and that these discourses will frame the encounter with other peoples and cultures.

However, as in *I miei giorni*, Gruber seems reluctant to elaborate on her own views relating to the position of women in Islamic communities: 'È una questione che sollevo sempre con i miei interlocutori nel mondo musulmano. Mi rifiuto tuttavia di esprimere un giudizio perentorio su un argomento estremamente delicato: il velo' (*Altro*, p. 275). Her interest in the issue is clearly apparent but she tries to avoid expressing a direct opinion on the subject, claiming that her focus is on political questions rather than women's issues per se. A strong articulation of her own position would perhaps inhibit her ability to portray the culture in a less sensational manner and counteract her intention to demystify the culture. Furthermore, any direct criticism of their society could potentially alienate her various interlocutors and thus thwart her aim to foster dialogue between cultures.

In order to promote this form of cultural exchange, her investigation centres on a series of interviews. In the course of these interviews, her notion of personal identity is revealed. This is a concept based on individual freedom and agency which contrasts with that of her interlocutors who frequently insist on their identity being constructed within the parameters of a religious community. This is most evident in her interview with

Zahra Shojaie, a former presidential advisor on women's issues in Iran.[43] Gruber's usually direct and intrusive style of questioning, more evident in *Chador*, is rather tempered in this interview. She is received in her official position as a Member of the European Parliament and this change in her professional identity sets the parameters for the meeting:

> Gli iraniani hanno deciso di ricevermi ufficialmente, come deputato europeo, e devo piegarmi alle regole di questo nuovo ruolo, diverse da quelle del giornalismo. Devo in particolare imparare ad ascoltare educatamente i discorsi diplomatici dei miei ospiti e a trattare argomenti delicati con determinazione ma senza aggressività: dovrò fare l'abitudine. (*Altro*, p. 274)

The repetition of the verb 'dovere' in the above quotation suggests that Gruber has to put forth considerable effort to conform to the norms of her new role which force her to suppress her own viewpoint and adopt a more restrained approach in the interview. Instead, Gruber uses frequent asides which enable her to share her point of view to the reader, rather than with her interviewee. When, for example, Shojaie claims that Iranian women have more freedom than women in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia as they are allowed access to the universities, Gruber reserves her critical comments for the reader: 'Mi trattengo dal dirle che è veramente il minimo. E comunque l'Iran resta sulla lista nera di Amnesty International per la violazione dei diritti delle donne, oltre che di quelli dei prigionieri' (*Altro*, p. 275).

The need to avoid judgment is again evident in her approach to the Islamic head covering. As Gruber enters Shojaie's office, she describes her appearance as follows: 'Il volto severo è incorniciato dal *hijab*' (*Altro*, p. 273). The adjective 'incorniciato' is used frequently in *I miei giorni* and *L'altro Islam* to describe the effect of the veil on its wearer: a frame draws the gaze towards the centre and perhaps even enhances the beauty

[43] Following the election of President Ahmadinejad in 2005, the Centre for Women's Participation was renamed the Centre for Women and Family Affairs.

of the object it surrounds. The use of 'incorniciato' therefore suggests an attempt on Gruber's part to avoid sensationalising the veil, to avoid stereotypes of Muslim women that appear in the Italian media, and also to avoid displaying too strong an indication of her own subjectivity. When Shojaie likens the veil to traditional costumes worn in other countries, Gruber again remains silent, but allows the reader to access her opinion on the matter: 'Evito di ricordale che in quei Paesi [India and Japan] le donne non sono comunque obbligate per legge a indossare gli abiti tradizionali' (*Altro*, p. 276). She appears to be trying to adapt a less confrontational approach in response to her new role and therefore tries to find common political ground whilst avoiding the more controversial question of the status of women in Islam. During the interview, however, she becomes increasingly aware that politics and the status of women cannot be separated:

> Mi sento inesorabilmente trascinata in un dibattito sulla donna mentre ero venuta in Iran per capire come vedono qui la crisi in Iraq e l'affermazione politica degli sciiti. Ma non posso sottrarmi. È un elemento centrale della politica iraniana ed è anche un'eccezionale posta in gioco del dopoguerra a Baghdad (*Altro*, p. 275)

Again, Gruber is concerned to present an objective view, giving both sides of the debate and expressing her opinion only to the reader. Whilst she believes that the veil should be a matter of 'scelta individuale'(*Altro*, p. 275), her interviewee argues: 'Il sistema giuridico islamico deve essere visto nella sua integrità [...] Non si può parlare di una cosa sola e non prendere in considerazione il resto, è un tutto unico' (*Altro*, p. 275).

Despite Gruber's reluctance to provide an open demonstration of her subjectivity in this interview, and indeed throughout *L'altro Islam*, much is revealed in her methodology. When Shojaie appeals to religious authority, Gruber supports her arguments with statistics from the United Nations and reports from Amnesty

International. She therefore positions herself as secular and liberal. Although she avoids direct confrontation with her interlocutors, her position of feminist individualism is made evident to the reader.

There is the sense in *L'altro Islam* that in order to understand others' subjectivity one has to first address one's own. It highlights the need to confront one's own fears and prejudices that may stand in the way of rapprochement with another culture. It is in *Chador*, the third work of the trilogy, that this idea is most fully developed. Gruber's month-long journey through Iran is also a journey inwards, into the preconceptions of Iran that her own society holds. The Chador of the title is more than just a physical garment; it is the outward symbol of the legacy of the Iranian revolution and embodies the struggle between modernity and tradition, religion versus secularism, the Shah and the Ayatollahs, and progressive and conservative elements of government. More importantly though, it is adopted by Gruber as a metaphor for the shroud of mystery that surrounds Iran, a country suspected by the West of developing nuclear weapons, accused of abusing human rights and supporting terrorist activities. This metaphoric Chador, then, is the reductive stereotype of Islamic fundamentalism and the superficial representations of Iran that Gruber strives to avoid. Her role as narrator is to uncover the reality beneath this veil, a reality which, she comes to realise, is extremely complex: 'Sotto il Chador le iraniane votano, lavorano, guidano l'automobile, pensano e combattono per i loro diritti' (*Chador*, p. 16).

Chador is the text in which Gruber leaves behind her pretensions to objectivity and allows her personal views and frustrations to filter through the narrative. She is conscious that her representation of Iran is one amongst many and is aware of the limits of her subjective investigation. A month, she says, will be 'troppo poco per capire tutto,

abbastanza per alzare il velo sui tanti misteri del regno degli ayatollah' (*Chador*, p. 16). There is also an acknowledgement that any interpretation of Iranian society will depend on the means by which it is accessed and the questions that are brought to bear on the investigation. In order to illustrate this she recalls a poem, 'Elephant in the Dark' by the Persian poet, Rumi (1207-73). In the poem, five people who had never seen an elephant take it in turns to enter a dark enclosure and offer very different interpretations of the creature based on what they were able to feel with the palm of their hand. The message in the tale is that if they had entered together, each holding a candle, they would have been able to see a more complete picture of the elephant. The use of a celebrated Persian literary figure can be seen as an attempt to immerse herself in Iranian culture by using Persian tools for her analysis. Further, she emphasises that her portrayal of Iran is just one perspective on a profoundly complex culture; that it should not be read in isolation; and that her understanding of Iran was made possible only with the help of her acquaintances: 'Altri lo hanno fatto prima di me e lo faranno dopo di me. Ma solo se ci proveremo tutti insieme riusciremo a comprendere meglio gli "elefanti al buio" e addomesticare le nostre paure' (*Chador*, p. 14). She therefore points then to the subjective nature of her representation of Iran and makes no claims to provide a complete picture.

Her own personality and status become an important way of getting closer to Iranian culture. She presents herself as sociable character who approaches people easily whether at the airport, in a café or in the market place, and is rarely alone. She is frequently being invited to dinner parties and visiting people in their homes and offices. Her methodology is therefore based on dialogue and cooperation as she allows Iranian people to reveal their society through conversations and interviews. She is modest in her

acknowledgement of the role that others play in revealing aspects of Iran to her: 'Sono curiosa e voglio andare a vedere. Ma soprattutto ad ascoltare chi mi aiuterà a sollevare un angolo del velo' (*Chador*, p. 12). Though guides and interpreters are often invisible in travel texts, Taraneh plays a prominent role in *Chador* and is described as 'una guida impagabile' (*Chador*, p. 14) and an 'apripista' (*Chador*, p. 61). She thus recognises that any interpretation of another culture also depends on the willingness of members of that culture to permit access to it.

As one might expect, for a western woman travelling in Islamic cultures, Gruber's experience is shaped by the gender expectations of the societies that she visits. In her previous works this issue had been sidelined but in *Chador*, as the title suggests, female subjectivity is brought to the forefront of the debate. During her month in Iran, she discovers a culture in which a person's role and position within the community is, to a large extent, determined by gender. This situation is highlighted in the opening words of the first chapter in the form of an announcement just before Gruber and her husband land in Tehran: 'Le leggi della repubblica islamica dell'Iran impongono alle donne di coprire i capelli con un velo' (*Chador*, p. 15). From the outset, she and the reader are made aware that she is entering a society with clearly defined boundaries of gender and in which women are considered subordinate to male members of society.

Gender is shown to determine a person's legal status in Iran as well as his or her access to certain places and professional roles. Even the definition of what constitutes a person becomes a question of gender. Rifaat Bayat, a sociologist and politician, explains to Gruber that she was prevented from standing as a candidate in the presidential elections because the term 'person' was interpreted as referring only to male members of society: 'Sono stata respinta dal Consiglio dei Guardiani in virtù dell'articolo 115: una

persona qualificata deve essere religiosa e politica. Ma i Guardiani interpretano la parola "persona" come "uomo"' (*Chador*, p. 101). As a western journalist, politician and a widely travelled woman, Gruber is accustomed to gaining access to places and also being afforded a certain amount of respect. Instead, in Iran she becomes increasingly frustrated when, owing to her gender, access to certain spaces is denied. When she tries to attend a football match, she discovers that women are denied entry with exceptions being made only for foreign women and those in receipt of a special invitation. Her access to the stadium is barred at numerous points causing her to become increasingly irate at the way in which she is treated: 'Perdo la pazienza e intervengo in inglese. Protesto, inveisco, alzo la voce' (*Chador*, p. 63). She raises her voice in protest, appealing to her rights and status as a foreign woman, demands to be referred to someone in authority, but to no avail: 'Mi riesce sempre più difficile sopportare questo atteggiamento arrogante' (*Chador*, p. 63). She eventually relies on her contacts to gain access where she otherwise might not but even inside the stadium, women are forced to sit in a segregated area under the close supervision of military police who remind them at frequent intervals to keep their heads covered.

Gruber's enquiry into Iran then is very much framed by her own ideas as to who she is. The problems that she faces as a woman in Iran lead to frustration with the political and religious system and it becomes increasingly difficult for her to put aside her personal opinions. She allows her interlocutors to express, through direct speech, their differing and often irreconcilable standpoints on the veil and Islam. For some the veil represents protection from an intrusive male gaze, for others it is an expression of their religious and cultural identity, for others it is an instrument of oppression. Nevertheless, in this text, Gruber's makes her own position clear through her choice of vocabulary.

When, for instance, she and Taraneh visit a mausoleum to mark the anniversary of the death of the Ayatollah Khomeini, the crowd of veiled women is portrayed as being thick and menacing. Gruber talks to a woman named Shahin who she describes as follows: 'Ha il viso imprigionato nel rigoroso foulard delle osservanti e dagli occhiali mi scruta con aria severa' (*Chador*, p. 42). Another woman in the crowd, Fatemeh, is described as 'avvolta nel velo ben stretto sotto il mento' (*Chador*, p. 43). This marks a departure from the vocabulary used to refer to the veil in previous texts. The shift from the more positive connotations of 'incorniciato' to 'imprigionato' (and later 'avvolto', 'nascosto', 'imbrigliato') with its emphasis on the restrictive nature of the veil seems to reflect more closely Gruber's feminist position on the veil. Her own position is also evidenced in her more argumentative interviewing style. Although Fatemeh is less than twenty years old, Gruber adopts quite an aggressive stance and even the language she uses to describe the interview focuses on confrontation, vigour and defence: 'Nonostante il caldo e la stanchezza ritrovo tutto il mio vigore di difensore dei diritti delle donne per affrontare una discussione con lei' (*Chador*, p. 43). Convinced of her position and no longer constrained by her political role, Gruber becomes more forceful in her criticisms until Fatemeh finally capitulates: 'abbassa la guardia, prende atto delle mie critiche, sembra condividere le mie argomentazioni' (*Chador*, p. 42). Gruber interprets this as evidence of a changing society or politeness to a stranger. However, in view of the obvious differences in age, status and experience combined with Gruber's confrontational stance, it is not surprising that Fatemeh concedes defeat.

Zohreh Sefati, the only woman ayatollah in Iran, is likewise described as 'imbrigliata nel chador nero' (*Chador*, p. 127), another thinly veiled criticism of the chador. Gruber again displays a domineering interviewing technique in which she pressurises others to

conform to her opinions. In her meeting with Safati's colleague, a male ayatollah, she succeeds in convincing him of her point of view: 'A lui riuscirò a estorcere l'ammissione che sarebbe meglio che le donne avessero il diritto di scelta sul Chador. Ma con la signora Sefati non ho altrettanto successo' (*Chador*, p. 127). Rather than the objective position she tries to adopt in previous texts, here the aim of the interview seems to be to convince others of her own position. She gets frustrated when people don't agree with her: 'confesso che comincio a innervosirmi dopo due ore di propaganda sui privilegi di cui le donne possono usufruire grazie al sistema dei mullah' (*Chador*, p. 129). As she leaves the office, Gruber reinforces her beliefs by expressing her own discomfort under the veil, which she claims, makes the 40 degree heat, seem more like 60 degrees.

Although Gruber does not actually define herself as a feminist in any of her texts, she clearly posits herself as a defender of women's rights, displaying a liberal concept of female identity in which each woman ought to be free to determine her own destiny: 'Non capisco in nome di quale tradizione – o addirittura in nome di quale religione – una giovane preparata non possa avere il diritto di cominciare una carriere professionale se ne ha voglia' (*Chador*, pp. 43-44). The dilemma therefore occurs between a liberal, individualist notion of women's rights and one in which women adopt subject positions assigned to them by religion and/or culture in order to be accepted as members of a given community. The internal struggle that Gruber faces in Iran is evidenced in a rather tense interview with the politician Bayat and two other colleagues:

> È sempre difficile giustificare un sistema che non considera le donne come persone. Tuttavia non voglio cadere nei luoghi comuni contro la Repubblica islamica. So che lo status delle donne rientra in una battaglia politica più ampia. È una battaglia graduale ma fondamentale, che farà spostare il centro di gravità dalle istituzioni teocratiche a quelle democratiche. Non si fermerà ma può distruggere tutto se avviene troppo rapidamente. (*Chador*, p. 102)

On one hand, she is attempting to enlighten the reader about Iranian society and culture without judgement and without leaving herself open to accusations of ethnocentricity. On the other, she finds that her position of feminist individualism conflicts with a system in which gender roles are assigned by the state, culture or religious tradition. Gruber therefore tries to counteract the position of her interviewee by referring to other conversations with Iranian women, rather than simply asserting her point of view: 'Racconto delle tante iraniane incontrate che riufiutano l'onnipresenza dello Stato nella loro vita privata e denunciano il malcontento di fronte alla rigidità di un sistema che le imbavaglia' (*Chador*, p. 102). Whilst Gruber insists on the individual woman's right to choose her mode of dress, career, and lifestyle, Bayat interprets women's rights from within the confines of Islam:

> La sfida per le donne è essere istruite, lavorare, essere buone madri e buone spose. L'Islam ha la soluzione: fare le casalinghe è un vero mestiere e per questo il marito o lo Stato dovrebbero retribuirle. (*Chador*, 104)

Gruber again adopts an antagonistic approach in this interview, challenging them to admit the problems facing women in Iran. The women insist, however, that Iran's problems are economic, not cultural and that the majority of women are happy with the veil. It is not greater freedom that women desire, but a strong economy and more jobs. Gruber's more harsh questioning style is evidenced here, an aspect she herself admits: 'Le tre rappresentanti del Parlamento non amano rispondere a domande seccanti' (*Chador*, p. 103).

At the heart of Gruber's encounter with Islam is the meeting of different notions of identity that challenge the concept of the sovereign individual subject and question the relationship between the individual and society. Though Gruber writes from multiple subject positions, a politician, a television personality, a western journalist, a traveller

and a defender of women's rights, in both her institutional roles and personal commitments she displays a consistent notion of identity: one that is rooted in the ideas of the European Enlightenment with its focus on universal rights and individual freedoms. However, the presumed universal rights that she champions appear to conflict with the values of the communities that she encounters, communities in which personal identities are determined by the necessity of group belonging. The Chador, for instance, has a homogenizing effect on the wearer; it obscures personal features and thus denotes conformity to the norms of the group rather than independence or individuality. This perhaps explains why many Muslim women living in Europe defend their right to wear the veil as they seek to define their subjectivities as members of a particular religious and cultural group. Gruber's journey through Iran therefore provokes a series of unresolved questions regarding subjectivity:

> Ho voglia di condividere con lui [Jacques] la mia impressione di una comunità saldamente unita in cui il gruppo e il suo destino vengono anteposti agli individui e alle loro ambizioni. / È forse in questo annullamento dell'io a vantaggio di un interesse superiore che l'Islam e la Rivoluzione si incontrano? Ma chi decide quali sono gli interessi comuni? Quando l'abbandono dell'io diventa obnubilamento, indottrinamento, dominio? (*Chador*, p. 303)

GIULIANA SGRENA: A PACIFIST IN A WAR ZONE

There are many similarities between Giuliana Sgrena and Lilli Gruber's accounts of Iraq as *Il fronte Iraq* and *I miei giorni a Baghdad* both report on the period immediately before and after the outbreak of war in 2003. However, Giuliana Sgrena's encounter with Iraq is a far more extreme one. In 2005 she was kidnapped and held hostage for one month with her abductors demanding the withdrawal of Italian troops from Iraq. *Fuoco amico* presents her version of the kidnapping, her time in captivity and the disputed chain of events surrounding her rescue. It combines personal testimony with an analysis

of the current social and political situation in Iraq and thus operates, as does *Il fronte Iraq*, as a damning indictment of US policy in the region. Indeed, Sgrena repeatedly refers to the Americans as arrogant (*Il fronte*, pp. 29, 58) and in both texts, she adopts the same decisive and accusatory tone: 'Gli americani e i loro alleati erano arrivati in Iraq non per liberare gli iracheni dalla tirannia di Saddam, ma per occupare una posizione strategica nella regione e mettere le mani sulle risorse altrettanto strategiche del paese: il petrolio (*Il fronte*, p. 110). *Fuoco amico* becomes the vehicle for a further denunciation of the motivations and methods of what she refers to as an illegal occupation, including the alleged use of chemical weapons and cluster bombs, and the murder and rape of Iraqi civilians. She accuses the US of exacerbating sectarian tensions, precipitating civil war and opening the gates to terrorist activity in Iraq. Her social analysis of Iraq points to the deteriorating conditions in the country, the lack of basic amenities and the increasing Islamisation of the region (*Fuoco*, pp. 88-108).

The oxymoronic title 'Fuoco amico' has a dual significance in Sgrena's work. It is, of course, a term that is commonly used to describe the unintentional wounding or killing of one's allies. Its most obvious interpretation, therefore, relates to the attack by American soldiers during which Sgrena received shrapnel wounds to her shoulder and which led to the death of her rescuer. The irony of the term here is that Sgrena suggests the attack was not unintentional and that, at best, it was an inevitable consequence of US incompetence and, at worst, a deliberate attempt on her life. The second meaning of the term relates to Sgrena's ideological positioning not just against the Iraq war but as a pacifist. She points out the paradox of being used as a weapon against her own government in a war she did not support. Moreover, as a critic of the war and as a journalist intent on bringing the suffering of Iraqi citizens to the attention of her

audience, she considers herself a friend of Iraq and therefore feels that her kidnappers had targeted the wrong person. She repeats the same question: 'Why me? (*Fuoco*, pp. 18, 157).

As a television presenter, Gruber shows an immediate awareness of her status as a public figure and the responsibility that she owes to her audience. In contrast, Sgrena, whose work consists mainly of written articles, does not consider herself to be an instantly recognisable figure. She insists 'Non è sul mio aspetto fisico che mi voglio concentrare' (*Fuoco*, p. 67). Yet, during her time in captivity she becomes increasingly aware of her public status. She initially describes herself to her abductors as a journalist from a small opposition newspaper and maintains that she wants to be known for what she writes rather than for her experience as a hostage: 'Inutile aggiungere che avrei preferito rimanere nell'anonimato, o conosciuta solo per quello che scrivo e non come ostaggio' (*Fuoco*, p. 42). However, she is thrust into the centre of media attention, forced by her kidnappers to make video appeals to the Italian government. She hears about the rally in Rome demanding her release, the show of solidarity by Italian footballers, and when she returns to Italy, strangers approach her in the street (*Fuoco*, p. 154). From a relatively faceless journalist reporting on other people's lives, she suddenly becomes the subject of media attention herself. This new-found public status is mixed with considerable unease, no doubt a consequence of the trauma of her ordeal (*Fuoco*, pp. 67, 72). Her reaction is to withdraw from the crowd and retreat into the privacy of her own space (*Fuoco*, p. 154).

Sgrena's authority in the text derives from her self-representation as, like Gruber, she presents herself as a hardened and courageous war reporter. She mentions her previous assignments in places such as Somalia and Afghanistan and no less than six

previous journeys to Iraq since the Gulf War of 1991 (*Fuoco*, p. 35). Her conscientious approach towards her journalism is underlined in the opening chapter in which she emphasises her determination to give a voice to the people of Iraq, despite the risks that this entails: 'L'idea di abbandonare il campo non mi aveva nemmeno sfiorata' (*Fuoco*, pp. 19). In her reporting of Iraq, she asserts herself as a journalist with integrity, one who is intent on revealing the truth regarding the refugees of Falluja. In asserting her honesty in such a manner, she gives added credibility to the account of her abduction.

Sgrena's time spent in isolation facilitates a period of self-reflection and analysis. As a result, a strong sense of her personality is communicated in her narrative. She describes being in a position in which she sees herself from an external perspective: 'Comincio a osservarmi dall'esterno' (*Fuoco*, p. 34). Whilst in captivity, she reflects on past events which have shaped her character, considers the people and relationships that are significant in her life and reassesses her personal beliefs. Her belief systems are placed under scrutiny by the extreme situation that she is forced into, yet the experience serves to reinforce her political and religious standpoints. She claims that at no time during her ordeal was she tempted to pray and that her ordeal thus reconfirmed her atheistic stance (*Fuoco*, p. 85).

Her identity becomes a decisive factor in surviving her ordeal, as she is forced to both establish and conceal facets of her self whilst in captivity. At first, she has to confirm her identity to her kidnappers to prove she is not a spy. She declares: 'Sono una giornalista, sono venuta qui per raccogliere le storie dei profughi di Falluja' (*Fuoco*, p. 7). Later, she has to withhold aspects of her self for fear that her abductors would turn against her. This involves pre-empting their reactions to various categories of identity as although she eventually admits to being a communist, she tries to avoid telling her

abductors that she is an atheist. She also conceals the fact that she is unmarried and co-habiting with her partner (*Fuoco*, pp. 83-84). At the same time, she is revealing important aspects of her subjectivity to her reader and establishing her position as a communist, pacifist, atheist and feminist.

Sgrena's subject position as trustworthy narrator depends on differentiating herself from a series of other figures, the first of which is that of the embedded journalist who, she believes, offers a partial and often censured version of reality (*Fuoco*, p. 8). During her time in Iraq she becomes conscious of a collapsing of personal identities into broader categories and her writing represents a struggle against such forms of categorisation. These include both perceptions of Iraqis and perceptions of westerners, both in Iraq and at home. In her account of her abduction, she is careful to distinguish between her kidnappers and ordinary Iraqi citizens who are themselves the target of criminal elements within their society. She also claims that many Iraqi people no longer differentiate between individual westerners; instead they are all grouped together as supporters of the US and therefore enemies of Iraq: 'Tutti gli stranieri sono diventati nemici, non c'è più distinzione tra governi e opposizioni, (*Fuoco*, p. 53). Sgrena's position and her very safety as a hostage depend on her being able to draw a distinction between individuals and the policies pursued by their governments. In *Il fronte Iraq*, she highlights the numbers of Italians that participated in protests against the Iraq war and refers to this as 'l'altra faccia dell'Italia' (*Il fronte*, p. 107). Throughout *Fuoco amico*, in both the reported conversations with her kidnappers and whilst addressing the reader, she attempts to distance herself from the position of the Italian government, thus warning against making assumptions based on national identity alone.

Instead, she positions herself as an ally of ordinary Iraqi people, referring to various individuals as her friends (*Fuoco*, pp. 10-11) and drawing parallels between her situation and theirs. The people with whom she aligns herself are other Iraqis rather than Italians. In *Fronte Iraq*, for example, she describes the peace protests from the perspective of the Iraqi people: 'Insieme agli iracheni ci tormentavamo sulle possibilità reali di evitare il conflitto' (*Il fronte*, p. 7). Whilst captive, she is stripped of the privileges of being a western journalist and no longer enjoys the comforts of hotel living. Instead, she is placed on a level with many other Iraqi citizens and suffers from the problems caused by the same intermittent water and electricity supplies (*Fuoco*, p. 27). She also points to the similarities between her situation as a prisoner and the condition of Iraq. Whilst captive, she is deprived of her liberty and her life is in limbo. Likewise, she argues, Iraq has been forcibly occupied and many people are afraid to leave their homes. She describes herself as 'in bilico tra la vita e la morte' whilst many Iraqis are 'sospesi tra la vita e la morte' (*Fuoco*, pp. 34, 48). In one way or another, she suggests they are all prisoners of a war that they had sought to avoid.

One of the most important aspects of her identity is that of gender. As a feminist and campaigner for women's rights, Giuliana Sgrena's reports on the Islamic Near East often focus on the condition of women in the countries through which she travels. Sgrena has written extensively on the condition of women in Islamic countries such as Algeria and Afghanistan and has contributed to debates in Italy surrounding the use of the veil. She condemns the veil for its exclusion of women from public life and segregation of genders, leading to what she refers to as 'società mutilate' (*Fuoco*, p. 95). She also dedicates chapter seven of *Fuoco amico* to an analysis of the deteriorating situation for women in Iraq since the start of the war in 2003. Nevertheless, unlike Fallaci, she does

not fall back on simplistic stereotypes in order to make her point. Rather, she is always conscious that 'sotto il velo c'è una donna'.[44] In her interviews with women from Falluja she maintains that the veil does not represent a barrier to dialogue and that despite their anger and desperation, these women convey a strong sense of dignity.

During Sgrena's travels through the Near East, the question of gender is never far from her consciousness. She admits that the gender segregation she had witnessed in many countries of the region had made her work as a female journalist more difficult: 'Mi sono sempre sentita a disagio quando sono stata costretta a vivere con soli uomini' (*Fuoco*, p. 95). Whilst in captivity, she is conscious that her gender has a particular bearing on the way she is treated and on the way in which the group of male militants interact with her. She is aware of certain cultural expectations of women that operate in Iraq, and realises that as a childless woman travelling without her partner, she represents a departure from these societal ideals: 'La mia diversità, di donna occidentale che gira sola per il mondo, anche se per lavoro, li sorprendeva e incuriosiva molto' (*Fuoco*, p. 82).

Despite the very different constraints on women in Iraq, Sgrena still believes that gender will provide the basis for some form of solidarity between herself and other women. When she feels uncomfortable amongst her all-male group of abductors, she invents a pretext so that they enlist the help of a female. She attempts to gain sympathy from this woman based on a mutual identification. However, this woman rejects her attempts and denies Sgrena the solidarity that she desires: 'Non ho potuto avere uno scambio come avrei voluto con quella donna invisibile e presente solo in momenti

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[44] Giuliana Sgrena, 'Tradizione o repressione?' *La Rivista del Manifesto*, July/August 2000: <http://www.giovaniemissione.it/mondo/afghislamdonne.htm> [accessed 1 September 2007]

particolari' (*Fuoco*, p. 98). She refuses to confirm her name, and she even appears to enjoy taunting Sgrena by suggesting that she may be killed (*Fuoco*, p. 98). Again, Sgrena does not rely on stereotypical representations of a passive Oriental woman as this woman is portrayed as determined and dignified. According to Sgrena, she carries an aura of strength and even the male kidnappers seem to be wary of her. Yet, her attempts to establish a bond with her based on gender ultimately fail as her position as a western woman seems to preclude any possibility of exchange.

In *Il fronte Iraq*, Sgrena does not reveal much about herself as a character in her text. It is rather in *Fuoco amico* that she attempts to define herself, providing her version of events, outlining her political beliefs, discussing her relationships and revealing her fears and weaknesses during her kidnapping ordeal. Yet, she also becomes aware that identities are determined from the outside and struggles to define herself against other categories of identity: the mainstream media of her own country, the Italian journalists, the military, and general perceptions of westerners. She attempts to forge alliances based on politics and on gender, which she believes will cut across the ethnic and religious divide. Naively perhaps, she expected that her identity as a pacifist, as a woman, and as a critic of the Italian government would have safeguarded her in Iraq. Regrettably, however, events prove this not to be the case and despite her attempts to define herself and to position herself as a friend of Iraq, she becomes the object of categorisation from outside forces. It is ultimately her national identity that makes her a target.

CONCLUSIONS

It could scarcely be more difficult to imagine more contrasting understandings of the contemporary moment than those of Fallaci on the one side, and those of Gruber and

Sgrena on the other. Their works span a series of perspectives that range across the political spectrum from the rightist position of the Lega Nord towards immigration to the centre-left and left characterisation of the American action in Iraq. Yet, paradoxical as it may sound, there is a link running through the work of all three writers and that is that they are each engaged in a struggle with defining themselves and their position with regard to the vast cultural forces that they attempt to describe. The different ways that the three writers conceptualise their own identity in their writing leads to very different interpretations of the Near East. The thesis of the 'clash of civilizations' that Fallaci borrows from Huntingdon leads to the polarised construction of two distinct entities: a secular West, that displays the inheritance of centuries of Christianity and a fundamentalist Islamic East. But what Fallaci attempts to do throughout her writing is to use herself not only as the self-appointed spokesperson of supposedly western values but as an example of the model of western civilization that she puts forward. The way that she claims the authority of tradition, the history of Italian that she constructs, and the consistently aggressive tone that she adopts serve to create a particular version of selfhood against which other notions of identity are contrasted. The portrait of the self that is woven into the writing is an intrinsic part of its polemic.

Though less overt, the elaboration of the first person in the works by Gruber and Sgrena is as important to the characterisations of the Near East. I do not wish to imply, simply, that their writing offers the antithesis of the Orientalist polarities that typify Fallaci's recent work. What I have attempted to argue, rather, is that the model of the investigative journalist that functions in their work is capable of a greater degree of introspective inquiry. The investigation into another society with which their work is essentially concerned involves a questioning of oneself. Their work is motivated not by

the desire to reinforce distinctions between cultures by insisting on the validity of stereotypes. Instead, there is an awareness that develops through their texts that the point of view of the onlooker frames the encounter with the other and that the ability to recognise the institutional site from which one speaks plays a crucial role in defining in what direction the encounter will move. Gruber explicitly tries to deconstruct western fears of the Near East by seeing how distinctions operate and by rigorously guarding against them. Yet, she acknowledges that she struggles to contain the evidently subjective nature of her views when confronted with notions of identity that challenge the very basis of her thought. Sgrena is involved in a dramatic struggle to free herself from the assumptions that she thinks are being made about her identity as a female western journalist. The journeys that the two journalists are engaged in are posited as investigations into the dependency of identity on culture. Their work does not suggest a 'clash of civilizations' but attempts to open up a space where dialogue is possible. It is in their confrontation of these issues that their work represents a particular type of journalism and a particular type of travel writing.

CONCLUSION

THE TRAVEL WRITING GENRE

One important aim of the thesis has been to show that there is a good deal of writing on the question of travel and displacement by Italian women in the recent past. Italian women have travelled to a range of destinations in a variety of roles. The thesis has obviously been selective in the texts that it has looked at and has focused on destinations which are significant for the nature of their relationship with Italy - as in the case of Eritrea, a former Italian colony, and South America, previously a major destination for Italian emigrants. Texts that could potentially have been included are those by women who lived and travelled in the colonies of other European countries, for example, representations of Egypt in the novels of Fausta Cialente, or Tunisia in the writing of Marinette Pendola.[1] Other works include the autobiographical writing of the Venetian, Kuki Gallman, who moved to Kenya with her second husband in 1972. Her writing, originally published in English, has been translated into several languages including Italian and her autobiography, *I Dreamed of Africa* (*Sognavo l'Africa*, 1991), was made into a film in 2000. Her other works include *La notte dei leoni* (2006) *Notti africane* (1997) and *Elefanti in giardino* (2003). Further representations of Africa include the travel accounts and guides of Silvana Olivo in *Kalahari: viaggio tra i Boscimani di Namibia, Botswana, Sud Africa* (2001), and *Sud Africa: il mondo in un solo paese* (2004). There also exist a significant number of accounts of travel to the Far East including Renata Pisu's journeys through Asia, China and Japan, and Angela Terzani

[1] Pendola was born into a family of Italian migrants living in Tunisia. For an analysis of her writing see Loredana Polezzi, 'Mixing Mother Tongues', 215-25.

Staude's diaries of periods spent in China and Japan with her husband Tiziano Terzani.[2] Dacia Maraini's *La Nave per Kobe* (2001) is based on her mother's account of a family voyage to Japan in 1937 and weaves her mother's memories with the author's own memories of life in Japan as well as recollections of previous journeys to Africa and India with Moravia and Pasolini.

Although the focus of the thesis has been on how Italian women have represented other cultures; it could also be expanded to include works by women who have migrated to Italy such as the writing of the Somalian-born Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, the Ethiopian-Italian writer Gabriella Ghermandi, or Ribka Sibhatu who was born in Asmara.[3] Their texts provide a further perspective on how migrants navigate within and around discourses of Italian national belonging. Such questions of migration are, of course, raised in the second section of *Blu Cina* in its portrayal of the biracial child's predicament of standing out as different in Italy and China. The discursive constraints over what it means to be Italian also extend to the publication and reception of Hirst's writing: despite having an Italian father, living in Italy for over fifty years and publishing in Italian, some internet book catalogues persist in classifying her work as 'narrativa straniera'.[4]

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[2] On Asia, see Renata Pisu, *Oriente express: storie dell'Asia* (Sperling & Kupfer, 2002). On China, see Renata Pisu, *La via della Cina*, which won the Premio Rapallo in 2000. See also Renata Pisu, *Cina: il drago rampante* (Sperling & Kupfer, 2006), and Angela Terzani Staude's diary of three years spent in China from 1980-1983 in *Giorni cinesi*. On Japan, see Renata Pisu, *Alle radici del sole. Il mille volti del Giappone: incontri, luoghi, riti e follie* (Sperling & Kupfer, 2000), and Angela Terzani Staude, *Giorni giapponesi* (Milan: TEA, 1997).

[3] See Lucie Benchouiha, 'Hybrid Identities' 251-62.

[4] See, for example, the entries for *Blu Cina* in the catalogues of libreriauniveritaria.it and dvd.it: <http://www.libreriauniversitaria.it/blu-cina-hirst-bamboo-piemme/libro/9788838454769> <http://www.dvd.it/page/dett/arti/246518/nv/LIB.NAS/blu_cina.html> [accessed 15 September 2007]

The texts that have been subject to analysis as well as those mentioned above demonstrate that writings that discuss the question of travel can be inscribed into a variety of genres. As Hooper and Youngs observe, travel writing involves the 'adoption of differing narrative styles and genres, [...] it effortlessly shape-shifts and blends any number of imaginative encounters.'[5] The travel accounts discussed include personal diaries and memoirs, autobiographies, semi-autobiographical fiction, novels, foreign correspondence, travelogues and travel guides. Some elements of the adventure narrative are also apparent in the writings of women travellers in India. Often the boundaries are blurred between one genre and another and even between fact and fiction. The authorial figures of this writing also occupy different status, their works have had access to different levels of dissemination, they write in an array of different styles and present a range of perspectives. These include the experimental work of Erminia Dell'Oro who fictionalizes a largely autobiographical self and writes the memory of Africa from the point of view of child protagonists; the range of perspectives achieved by Laura Pariani who gives voice to fictionalized figures of Italian migration to Argentina; the unmediated accounts of travel and displacement contained in the archives of Pieve Santo Stefano; Hirst's probing of the psychological development the individual, her ability to link the personal to the historical and her bold dramatic statements on her sense of rootlessness; the sustained introspective gaze of Sandra Petrignani and Francesca De Carolis; the assertive rhetoric of Fallaci and the merging of journalistic reporting with subjective analysis in Gruber and Sgrena's interpretations of current events in the Near East.

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[5] Hooper and Youngs, 'Introduction', in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, p. 3.

Not only do these texts demonstrate the hybridity and flexibility of writings about travel, but they also show how different forms of travel overlap. The links between journalism and travel writing are another feature of this writing, as many of the women discussed (Fallaci, Gruber, Sgrena, Petrignani, De Carolis and Borghese) are also regular contributors to Italian newspapers and journals. The journalistic mission can lead to a developing interest in certain areas and prompt a more personal investigation of the cultures through which they travel, as occurs in the case of Iran and Shiite Muslim culture in the work of Lilli Gruber.

One facet of this body of writing is its links with migration. As outward migration from Italy was a major phenomenon until the last few decades of the twentieth century, it is not surprising that many of the texts that the thesis examines are linked to the migratory experience. It could be argued that much of twentieth-century Italian travel writing is bound up with the history of Italian migration in the same way that travel writing in English is bound up with the history of British imperial expansion. In these writings, however, migration, travel and tourism become points along a continuum of movement between cultures rather than distinct categories. Erminia Dell'Oro and Bamboo Hirst, for example, both grew up outside Europe and later migrated to Italy. They return as adult travellers to the lands of their birth and their previous experiences in the countries they visit provide added resonance to their adult journeys. Bamboo Hirst's writing is also difficult to categorize. It includes stories of migration (*Blu Cina* and *Inchiostro*), travelogues of visits to China (*Il mondo* and *Cartoline*), history and reportage (*Figlie di Cina*), and even her book of recipes with its personal anecdotes and fables could be considered as an account of a journey through China's culinary traditions. Accounts of migration and tourism also intersect in the various works of

Laura Pariani. Although *Quando Dio ballava il tango* and *Il paese dei sogni perduti* both centre on the migrant experience, the stories represented derive from conversations and interviews with people that the author met whilst undertaking her own journey through Argentina and her later work is a travelogue set in Patagonia. As the writings of Pariani and others show, a family history of migration can lead to a continuing sense of dislocation which prompts journeys into other lands in order to gain a deeper sense of their roots, in other words, a deeper understanding of the self.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Another feature which unites these diverse texts is their close links with autobiography. Referring to the last decade of the twentieth century, Jim Philip claims that 'the lives of more and more human subjects have a thread of travel woven into their fabric'.[6] One consequence of this is that, in more and more autobiographical texts, the journey is seen to be of central importance to the development of the self. Bamboo Hirst provides an overtly autobiographical text, involving a quite self-conscious construction of the self in the narrative. Clearly the movement between Italy and China is one of the major factors in making her aware of the process of identity as a series of performative strategies. To a lesser degree, the fictional protagonists of Dell'Oro's writing mirror her own experiences of growing up in Eritrea and moving to Italy as an adult. Even when the text is not presented as autobiographical, there are clearly autobiographical elements to much of the writing. For example, Laura Pariani's interest in Argentina stems from her own family and community's history of migration to South America and the journey of the

[6] Jim Philip, 'Reading Travel Writing', p. 241.

main protagonist of *Quando Dio ballava il tango*, Corazón Bellati, appears to be an inverted image of the author's life.

THE IDENTITY OF THE TRAVELLER

Perhaps more importantly, the variation that one sees in the styles of writing also hints at the extensive range of concerns that travel writing is used to address. The thesis has been concerned with investigating the ways in which representations of travel and displacement address the question of the identity of the author or narrating subject. Charles Grivel argues that writing about a journey means writing about the subject and how the subject constructs his or her 'I' whilst engaged in the journey and its subsequent narration. [7] Gaia Di Pascale suggests that in an age where images of and information about distant places are easily accessible from the media or via the internet, the importance of travel writing lies not in its ability to reveal the world to the reader, but in what it reveals about the self of its authorial subject. Travel then becomes a 'mezzo per scoprire le infinite possibilità dell'io a contatto con l'altro'. [8] Similarly, Casey Blanton traces a shift in travel narratives from informative, impersonal textual accounts of an object-bound journey to explicitly autobiographical narratives with highly self-conscious narrators.[9] Accounts of travel are no longer valued for providing a source of information of people and places; rather their interest lies in the way in which the narrative figure interacts with and responds to the people and places s/he encounters. Like the

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[7] Charles Grivel, 'Travel Writing', in *Materialities of Communication*, ed. by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, trans. by William Whobrey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 242-57 (p. 256).
[8] De Pascale, p. 239.
[9] Blanton, p. 15.

protagonist of Tabucchi's *Notturno indiano*, whether they recognise it or not, the travellers are engaged in a pursuit of the self.

All the texts considered by the thesis are concerned with identity, both that of their author and that of the people who are represented. The focal point of these texts is the traveller's sense of self and her relationship with the outside world. The analysis of the writings of Fallaci, Gruber and Sgrena in Chapter Five shows that even those texts that stem from foreign correspondence feature self-reflective narrators and the interpretation they offer of another country is very much dependent upon the way the narrator understands and represents her self in the text. The thesis has addressed the writings on travel through a methodology that is broadly post-structuralist insofar as it sees identity not as an irreducible essence but as being located in the articulations of the self or in its performance. It sees individual identity as dependent on the social and cultural structures that lie outside the self yet to a large extent dictate the workings of its subjectivity. By looking at writing through the series of questions posed by this methodology, each text reveals the extent to which the self that is represented is contingent and, to a greater or lesser extent, bound by discourses of place, gender, origin, culture and indeed race.

Different types of travel to different types of locality bring different constituents of identity into focus, but in all texts travel and the subsequent writing on its experience serve as a means of becoming conscious of fractures in the solidity of self-construction. As Charles Grivel contends, when the body is set in motion through space the experience has an impact upon systems of perception, the condition of consciousness, and this, of course, can create confusion and radical instability.[10] Movement between places and cultures makes the traveller more aware of the precarious nature of the self,

[10] Grivel, p. 250.

and all writers discussed here, in one way or another, document a struggle with the processes by which the self is formed and makes sense of its surroundings. In these accounts of travel there are different levels of consciousness about the extent to which travel impinges on identity and yet every text foregrounds the challenge that travel presents to a fixed notion of identity.

Dell'Oro represents a subjectivity that sits awkwardly in terms of situation and in terms of time. Her attempt to move away from notions of the past that circulate within her community of former residents of Asmara is also a desire not to be confined by narrow visions of the past which impinge on her sense of self in the present. Her work also shows how discourses of race, class and gender operated within the colony and the subject positions available to both Italian women and indigenous women within colonial society. The writings by emigrants to Argentina reveal the fundamental importance of the notion of home for personal identity, both as a geographical and cultural place of origin and yet they reveal how this notion is itself deeply problematic. Dell'Oro and the writers on South America all reveal to some extent the trauma of displacement and the consequences when the links between self, community and place are severed.

The travel narratives of Hirst follow a particular and easily identifiable dynamic which follows the development of the first person's consciousness of who she is. She struggles with her sense of cultural rootlessness, which is expressed in her writing through feelings of being out of place, torn between two cultures but not belonging to either one. China represents a place of origins, yet one from which she is estranged, whilst Italian society appears to reject her on account of her difference. She overcomes her sense of division by manipulating signifiers of race and of gender and is eventually able to gain a limited amount of control over her self-representation.

Petrignani attempts to move away from the sense of religious identity that has been mapped out for her by her own culture and the world view that it encapsulates. The notion of Catholic identity that she rejects is one which asserts fixed gender roles and behaviours, yet in abandoning this belief system she is left with a sense of loss. Her journey through India is an attempt to fill that void through an investigation of various elements of Hindu religion and the concept of being in the world that they communicate. Her writing is clearly intended to be read as a search for personal meaning and an investigation into the workings of the self. Petrignani is, to a degree, equating the notion of personal identity with the predominant religious philosophy that underlies one culture or another. Religious belief, she seems to suggest, even when unacknowledged or even rejected, is central to the way in which the self is perceived.

Fallaci has a particular notion of self, of gendered subjectivity and of Italian national identity. Her work too is an attempt to exercise control over these aspects of identity. Her narrative self rejects societal norms of femininity in favour of a courageous, defiant self, modelled explicitly on a particular notion of masculinity. She struggles with the changing nature of Italian society as a result of immigration and her argument situates itself within a narrow and anachronistic notion of *italianità*. The equation that she makes between herself and the history of Italian identity that she constructs further demonstrates the importance of place in her self-perception. The way in which her sense of identity is constructed in opposition to the negative stereotype of the other that she puts forward becomes an example of how the community articulates its negative perceptions of what it deems to exist only beyond its norms.

Gruber also grapples with constructions of identity as her work is a response to formations of otherness that, she argues, have resulted in a growing sentiment of

islamophobia within western societies. She attempts to move away from identities based on stereotype towards a deeper understanding of individuals and her work pays specific attention to deconstructing stereotypes of the female other. In the process she becomes aware that her own culture has specific ways of thinking about human identity which will inevitably frame one's perception of other cultures. Giuliana Sgrena tries to carve a position for herself which is outside of categories of instant recognition that would normally apply to a female, Italian journalist working in Iraq. She attempts to differentiate herself from the position of the Italian government and from the mainstream press. Yet, she too becomes aware of the difficulties in moving beyond stereotypes and other common perceptions of identity.

Writing about the self is an integral part of the construction of subjectivity and the way in which the experience of travel is encoded reflects the writers' various approaches towards identity. Hirst's attempt to combine four texts into one autobiography can be read as an attempt to create a coherent and unified self and thus heal the fissures that are deeply embedded in her awareness of who she is. In Chapter Two of the thesis, writing about home provides a form of therapy for women migrants which helps them to make sense of their displacement and construct a sense of self when their sense of home is highly problematic. Petrignani's sense of postmodern subjectivity is also revealed in the composition of her text, notably in her rejection of rigid narrative structures, the fluidity of her writing, the non-linear nature of the account and its departure from chronological time. Her decentred approach to the journey is apparent in her unwillingness to provide any sense of her itinerary or goal and in the text's fragmentation into moments of particular emotional intensity and self-reflexivity. Fallaci's sense of self is revealed in

the control she is determined to exercise over her text and its meaning, particularly in her refusal to let it be translated by anyone other than herself.

MEMORY AND TIME

If it is true that in many texts, there is an emphasis on self-construction or an engagement with the structures of autobiography, then one of the most striking features of all the texts that the thesis has examined is their treatment of time and in particular the internal sense of time of the individual. The places represented in the texts are situated in time and through talking about travel between spaces the writers are also referring to travel through time. These writings reveal the different strata of memory as memories of childhood journeys are overlaid with memories of adult journeys, stories of journeys undertaken by previous generations, and memories of textual representations of travel by other writers. All these layers of memory reverberate onto the journey that is being described within each individual account.

These texts demonstrate that personal memories do not exist in isolation. As the first chapter of this thesis argues, Dell'Oro's work should be read together with the writings of other former residents of Asmara. Together they form a body of work which comments on the memory of the colonial period. The literary works of Pariani are also part of a wider body of texts on the migratory experience which include unpublished memoirs of travel. Personal recollections are shown to be influenced by stories repeated by family members, official discourses of history that circulate within cultures and the narrative framework that one's community provides for talking about the past. Thus, the texts themselves are only indications of an infinitely wider pattern of concepts, associations and philosophies.

Memories are an essential part of Petrignani and De Carolis's motivations for travel through India. Petrignani remembers the sense of loss that she felt as a child when she realised that she could not identify with Catholicism.[11] Through a dream, De Carolis recalls images of her childhood home in the South of Italy and her nostalgia for this home prompts a journey south.[12] Their memories trigger a search for origins and unity beyond the territorial and philosophical limits of their own culture. In a very different sense, memory is evoked by Fallaci as a locus of identity. Her sense of national identity depends on memories of certain moments of Italy's past such as its intellectual and artistic contribution during the Renaissance or the role that her relatives performed in the Resistance. In the writings of Hirst, the memory of childhood experience is used as a means of working out what the meaning of the narrator's identity might be and to bring sense to her performance of cultural identity. In her recollection of place, Hirst brings to light the workings of memory, in particular the tendency of memory to embellish the past. On her return journey to Shanghai, the authorial protagonist discovers the unreliable nature of memory as the city that confronts her pales in comparison with the images that exist in her memory.

The capacity of travel to excite memory is alluded to by Fabrizia Ramondino in her reflections on travel in *In viaggio*. She recounts details of a journey to China in which she encounters the apparition of her father at various points of his life: with his lover on a boat on the Yangtze River, as a young man on a staircase in Tianjin, as an old man at a watermelon stall in Beijing. She also visualises her mother in Luxor, on the banks of the Dead Sea and in Beirut. Her journeys become a mode of investigating her own past, of

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[11] Petrignani, *Ultima India*, p. 49.
[12] De Carolis, *India: appunti di viaggio*, p. 11.

delving into her relationships with each of her parents and reflecting on the childhood experiences that have shaped her present identity. Her representation of travel provides an indication of the way that memories of the past impinge the way places are experienced in the present.

The haunting qualities of memory that Ramondino alludes to are also brought to the fore in Dell'Oro's portrayal of Milena's return to Eritrea in *Asmara addio*. When she returns as an adult the city seems to have lost its magical qualities and is described as a 'sogno stracciato'.[13] As the title suggests, the return journey is about bidding farewell to a certain memory of place, a letting-go of the past. Garetto too portrays her return journeys to Italy as an eerie experience which draws attention to her sense of being displaced in time as well as place. Through their journeys, the narrative figures of these texts are forced to confront the fact that places are continually changing and that their memories are not dependable. Their sense of self depends on the connection they feel to a certain location which had become the focus of nostalgia. Subsequently when the validity of memory is questioned, their visions of self are thrown into disarray. The return journey does not provide for the healing of the fracture between self and place. Instead, it reveals the impossibility of returning 'home' and results in the trauma of the realisation that home is, in fact, only a memory.

All these attributes of memory are to be found in the work of Dell'Oro: the way in which memory is linked to community memory, the tendency of memory to idealise the past, the unreliability of memories of childhood. However, memory in her work is dynamic: it responds to the present and to changing attitudes towards the national past. Its evocation reflects inner feelings of uncertainty, loss or guilt. This is opposed to forms

[13] Dell'Oro, *Asmara addio*, p. 240.

of memory that remain principally static, as in the case of Marisa Baratti or, in a different way, Garetto's unchanging visions of home in Italy. A startling feature of Fallaci's later work – but perhaps one that in part explains its popularity – is that the author refuses to accept the changing dynamics of place. She attempts to project static memories of Italy's past onto future constructions of Italian national identity. The result is possibly reassuring but it depends upon a highly aggressive attitude towards the underlying forces of globalization.

TYPES OF SPACE

The reference to memory leads to one of the most interesting features of the texts and that is the construction of imaginary or ideal spaces that one witnesses in every text. The workings of imagination are central to the travel experience. Places are anticipated before travel, important sights are marked out as worthy of interest and ideas of place are developed through the traveller's interaction with other texts and images. The accounts of travel all reveal how places signify: Buenos Aires signifies modernity; La Mèrica represents a land of opportunity and later the United States come to symbolise power and patriotism; India equals mysticism and spirituality; Africa is portrayed as an uncontaminated place of origins; Iran conjures up images of oppression and religious fervour. These writers, of course, differ in their ability and willingness to challenge these signifiers and deconstruct stereotypical images of people and place. Indeed, some deliberately use them in support of the tenets of their work. Fallaci's rage against Islam, for example, depends upon a series of essentialist stereotypes. Gruber's project, on the other hand, is aimed at breaking down these signifiers and dispelling popular myths surrounding the countries she visits. Dell'Oro's novels similarly show up the flaws in

images of Africa as a terrestrial paradise. Pariani and women migrants to South America show how the migrant dream was tinged with regret and the trauma of displacement from home. Through her representation of agoraphobia, Garetto shows how the modern city can become a site of horror and entrapment.

In the texts by Dell'Oro, Hirst and the migrants to South America there is also the construction of an ideal space; a space that seems to represent a place of refuge from the pressures upon the individual and the sense of trauma that she confronts. Dell'Oro cannot easily portray Asmara as a utopian home. It is instead the coral island of Modok, referred to at the start and end of *Asmara addio*, that functions as an ideal, yet elusive place. Milena is unsure as to whether she actually visited this enchanted place or whether her memories of the place stem from her dreams. In a similar way, Hirst relates the legend of *il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore*, which functions as a sort of personal Shangri-la. Again this is an idyllic, fairytale place which exists in the memory and imagination and which cannot be accessed. Hirst uses this legend to explain her feelings of travelling back to China and looking for a place which corresponds to her memories, yet realising the impossibility of this desire. For Pariani, Garetto, Ferrante, this mythical place is the figurative home, a place of refuge and belonging in their dislocated lives. Related to this search for a sense of meaning through place is the way in which Petrignani and De Carolis both construct India as an ideal space representing unity and origins, although their journeys too reveal that authenticity will always be beyond their reach. They travel to India in order to escape the western world and its way of thinking, yet they come to realise the inaccessibility of the place that they wish to visit and the impossibility of transcending the limits of western philosophies. The ultimate irony of their journeys is that they are unwilling to recognize themselves in the figure of

the tourist, yet find that they are trapped within a tourist itinerary and within this category of identity.

THE REPRESENTATION OF ITALIAN HISTORY

Another factor that emerges very strongly from this body of writing is its connection with history. Though written in the recent past, the texts that the thesis considers address a much greater arch of time and their representation of lives stretches deep into the Italian experience of the twentieth century. Italy's colonial period and the workings of individual and collective memories of the colonial past are represented in the work of Dell'Oro. Her writing typifies the third stage of memory as defined by Nicola Labanca as it interweaves positive memories with an awareness of the aggressive nature of colonial occupation.[14] The history of European colonialism is also represented in the work of Bamboo Hirst through her portrayal of life in the international concessions of Shanghai. In *Blu Cina*, public and private histories intertwine as the relationship between Baia Verde and 'Il Veneziano' mirrors the war-time relationship between China and the European imperial powers. Dell'Oro and Hirst both reveal the workings of colonialism through the topographies of the cities of Asmara and Shanghai, most notably in their portrayal of racial segregation. These two writers especially represent the disintegration of Italian imperialist aspirations and more obliquely, the memory of Fascism, the Second World War and its aftermath. They consider themselves, their life experiences and the perspective through which they consider their places of origin to be intimately bound up with the European history of colonialism.

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[14] Nicola Labanca, 'History and Memory of Italian Colonialism Today', p. 36.

The writings of Pariani and the memoirs of women migrants to South America cover almost a century of Italian migratory history and document waves of outward migration to the Americas at the beginning of the twentieth century and during the immediate post-war period. These texts also show the impact of Italy's economic boom in the late 1950s and how changing images of Italy abroad led to a reversal of roles between Argentina and Italy: Italy then became the land of opportunity in the minds of Italians living in Argentina. The question of migration is, of course, at the heart of Fallaci's trilogy of texts. Fallaci brings migration full circle in her discussion of inward migration in contemporary Italy. Her argument and her sense of self as a courageous, masculine figure both rely on certain interpretations of the Italian Resistance and the Risorgimento. She calls on Italians to reignite their sense of national pride and to come together to rid Italy of what she portrays as the foreign enemy. Other aspects of Italian history and society are the subject of comment by women travellers in India. Their journeys are prompted by disillusionment with values of western societies and the travel accounts thus become an expression of their anxieties surrounding contemporary Italian culture, confirming Bassnett's claim that 'the way in which an individual reacts to what is seen elsewhere can reflect tendencies in the travellers' home culture'.[15] Petrignani, De Carolis and Borghese all reflect on a general tendency towards secularisation in the West, and specifically on the decline of religious influence in Italy. De Carolis especially uses her journey through India to comment on other social changes taking place in Italy, such as the crisis of *denatalità* and Italy's ageing population. Finally, Gruber and Sgrena provide an analysis of some of the major events of the twenty-first century and the nature of Italy's involvement in the Near East.

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[15] Bassnett, 'Constructing Cultures', p. 93.

However, these writers do not just comment on history but through their accounts of travel they actively engage with common perceptions of the past, pointing to the lacunae of constructions of past and present realities. They show how our understanding of history and ways of interpreting the world are framed by prevailing discourses of our own culture. Dell'Oro's representations of Eritrea point to the limited vision of many Italian residents of the former colony and, one might argue, of Italians generally, since her work is explicitly motivated by the desire to make the story of Italy's connection to Eritrea known to as many people as possible. Through the actions of her characters, such as the Italian woman in *La Gola* who, as she heads towards the bar, ignores the child begging on the street, she accuses her community of being blind to the suffering around them.[16] Through her portrayal of landscape she highlights the blemishes in their notion of paradise. More directly, she addresses episodes of history that had been vehemently denied by some members of this community, such as the uses of chemical weapons by Italian forces in Ethiopia and the poisoning of Lake Ashangi in 1936. Pariani also aims to reconstruct a forgotten past and her writing foregrounds the experiences of women whose stories were often left out of official histories of migration. She includes representations of the lives of women migrants who travelled with their families to South America as well as those of women who were left behind, the so-called white widows, whose husbands, fathers and sons never returned. The story of Hirst's parents in the first section of *Blu Cina* highlights the effect of the racial politics of Fascism on individual lives, whilst the experiences of the biracial child, hidden away from society in China and Italy, brings into the open an often unacknowledged side of colonialism, one that Dell'Oro also confronts in her novel *L'abbandono*. Whilst Dell'Oro attempts to

[16] Dell'Oro, *La Gola del Diavolo*, p. 91.

deconstruct myths of the colonial past which circulate within her community. Lilli Gruber attempts to move beyond a blinkered view of cultures of the Near East and expounds stereotypes of Islam that, she believes, are perpetuated by the mainstream media. Both Gruber in her account of war in Baghdad and Sgrena in her reporting on Falluja, try to give a voice to the people they encounter, whose testimonies do not always fit with official versions of history or coincide with dominant images of the world.

WRITING THE SELF / WRITING THE JOURNEY

In her discussion of the formation of human identities, Adriana Cavarero opens with a story recounted by Karen Blixen, a fable which seems to have a particular resonance for writings about travel not just because Blixen herself is well-known for her representations of life in Kenya but also for the way in which it portrays the character's personal journey:

> A man, who lived by a pond was awakened one night by a great noise. He went out into the night and headed for the pond, but in the darkness, running up and down, back and forth, guided only by the noise, he stumbled and fell repeatedly. At last, he found a leak in the dike, from which water and fish were escaping. He set to work plugging the leak and only when he had finished went back to bed. The next morning, looking out of the window, he saw with surprise that his footsteps had traced the figure of a stork on the ground.[17]

Although there is purpose in the course he follows, its consequences are not foreseen and it is only by looking back on his brief journey that he begins to see some sort of design emerging from it. By looking from an outside perspective onto the path he had traced he obtains a sense of unity, yet this is just a fleeting glimpse as his footsteps soon wash away. The writers discussed in the thesis, even when they follow in the footsteps of other migrants or other travel writers, portray unique personal trajectories. It is in the

[17] Cavarero, p. 1.

retrospective narration of their journeys that they attempt to make sense of their experiences of travel and displacement. They reveal a desire for a coherent sense of self which they attempt to construct through their narrative, yet in telling their story they also become aware of the difficulties of fixing identities, whether those of people or place. If, as Petrignani concludes, the centre is not out there but is within, then the real objective of travel and travel writing is the discovery of the self and the processes which make up the self with all its facets, weaknesses, fractures and desires.[18]

[18] Petrignani, *Ultima India*, p. 163.

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